3 1761 06892570 0

*Presented to the*
LIBRARY *of the*
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
*by*

MR. & MRS. C.S. MARTIN

A. H. [illegible]

# MISS MISANTHROPE

Library Editions, crown 8vo., cloth extra, 3s. 6d. each.

# THE PICCADILLY NOVELS.

By MRS. ALEXANDER.
Maid, Wife, or Widow?

By WALTER BESANT & JAMES RICE.
Ready-Money Mortiboy.
My Little Girl.
Case of Mr. Lucraft.
This Son of Vulcan.
With Harp & Crown.
The Golden Butterfly.
By Celia's Arbour.
Monks of Thelema.
'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay.
The Seamy Side.
Ten Years' Tenant.
Chaplain of the Fleet

By ROBERT BUCHANAN.
Shadow of the Sword
A Child of Nature.
God & the Man.
Martyrdom of Madeline

By MRS. H. L. CAMERON.
Deceivers Ever.
Juliet's Guardian.

By WILKIE COLLINS.
Antonina.
Basil.
Hide and Seek.
The Dead Secret.
The Queen of Hearts.
My Miscellanies.
The Woman in White
The Moonstone.
Man and Wife.
Poor Miss Finch.
Miss or Mrs.?
The New Magdalen.
The Frozen Deep
The Law and the Lady.
The Two Destinies.
The Haunted Hotel.
The Fallen Leaves.
Jezebel's Daughter.
The Black Robe.

By WILLIAM CYPLES.
Hearts of Gold.

By MRS. ANNIE EDWARDES.
Archie Lovell.

By M. BETHAM-EDWARDS.
Felicia.

By R. E. FRANCILLON.
Olympia.
Queen Cophetua.

By EDWARD GARRETT.
The Capel Girls.

By CHARLES GIBBON.
Robin Gray.
For Lack of Gold.
In Love and War.
What will World say?
For the King.
In Honour Bound.
Queen of the Meadow
In Pastures Green.
A Heart's Problem.
Flower of the Forest.

By THOMAS HARDY.
Under the Greenwood Tree.

By JULIAN HAWTHORNE.
Garth.
Sebastian Strome.
Ellice Quentin.
Prince Saroni's Wife

By SIR ARTHUR HELPS.
Ivan de Biron.

By MRS. ALFRED HUNT.
Thornicroft's Model.
The Leaden Casket.

By JEAN INGELOW.
Fated to be Free.

By HENRY JAMES, Jun.
Confidence.

By HARRIETT JAY.
Queen of Connaught.
The Dark Colleen.

By E. LYNN LINTON.
The World Well Lost
The Atonement of Leam Dundas.
Patricia Kemball.
Under Which Lord?
With a Silken Thread
Rebel of the Family.
'My Love!'

By HENRY KINGSLEY.
Number Seventeen.
Oakshott Castle.

By JUSTIN McCARTHY.
Waterdale Neighbours.
My Enemy's Daughter.
Linley Rochford.
A Fair Saxon.
Dear Lady Disdain.
Miss Misanthrope.
Donna Quixote.
Comet of a Season.

By GEORGE MACDONALD.
Paul Faber.
Thomas Wingfold.

By MRS. MACDONELL
Quaker Cousins.

By KATHARINE S. MACQUOID.
Lost Rose.
The Evil Eye.

By FLORENCE MARRYAT.
Open! Sesame!
Written in Fire.

By JEAN MIDDLEMASS.
Touch and Go.

By D. CHRISTIE MURRAY.
A Life's Atonement.
Joseph's Coat.
Coals of Fire.

By MRS. OLIPHANT.
Whiteladies.

By JAMES PAYN.
Lost Sir Massingberd
The Best of Husbands
Fallen Fortunes.
Halves.
Walter's Word.
What He Cost Her.
By Proxy.
Under One Roof.
Less Black than we're Painted.
High Spirits.
A Confidential Agent
Carlyon's Year.
From Exile.
A Grape from a Thorn
For Cash Only.

By CHARLES READE.
It is Never Too Late to Mend.
Hard Cash.
Peg Woffington.
Christie Johnstone.
Griffith Gaunt.
The Double Marriage
Love Me Little, Love Me Long.
Foul Play.
Cloister and Hearth.
The Course of True Love.
The Autobiography of a Thief, etc.
Put Yourself in His Place.
Terrible Temptation
The Wandering Heir.
A Simpleton.
A Woman-Hater.
Readiana.

By MRS. J. H. RIDDELL.
Her Mother's Darling.
The Prince of Wales's Garden Party.

By JOHN SAUNDERS.
Bound to the Wheel.
One Against the World.
Guy Waterman.
The Lion in the Path.
The Two Dreamers.

By T. W. SPEIGHT.
The Mysteries of Heron Dyke.

By BERTHA THOMAS.
The Violin-player.
Proud Maisie.
Cressida.

By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.
Way We Live Now.
American Senator.
Frau Frohmann.
Marion Fay.

By T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE.
Diamond Cut Diamond.

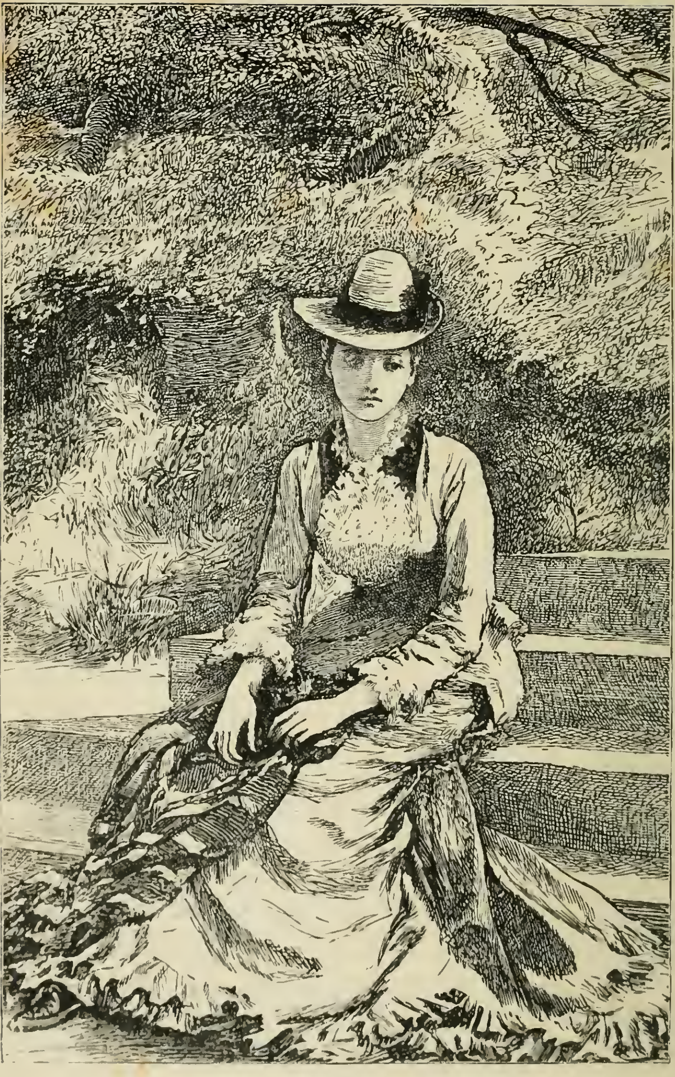
By SARAH TYTLER.
What She Came Through.
The Bride's Pass

By J. S. WINTER.
Cavalry Life.

*CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.*

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Toronto

http://www.archive.org/details/missmisanthrope00mcca



"*She sat down again and waited.*"

# *MISS MISANTHROPE*

BY

JUSTIN M<sup>c</sup>CARTHY, M.P.

AUTHOR OF
"DEAR LADY DISDAIN" "A FAIR SAXON" ETC.

"'Or Miss Misanthrope?' he suggested. 'How would that do for a young lady's name?'"

*A NEW EDITION*

*WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARTHUR HOPKINS*

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

LONDON : PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

LIBRARY
JUN 23 1967
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

# *DEDICATION.*

WHILE this story was yet in progress as a serial through the *Gentleman's Magazine*, a report of the Author's death found its way into the newspapers. That report drew forth from colleagues of his in literature and journalism so many kindly expressions of regret, and from private friends so many letters to his family—first of condolence, and then, when the report was corrected, of congratulation—that it would be vain for him to attempt to express in separate words to each his thanks for the sympathy so shown. The Author knows no better way of conveying his grateful recognition of friendly feeling, and at the same time proving himself alive, than by dedicating this book to each and all of the kindly men and women who wrote or spoke with regret of him, believing him to be dead.

# CONTENTS.

CHAPTER PAGE

I. Miss Misanthrope . . . . . . . . . 1

II. The Eve of Liberty . . . . . . . . 13

III. The Man with a Grievance . . . . . . 23

IV. "Oh, much-desired Prize, sweet Liberty!" . . . 32

V. Miss Grey's first Call . . . . . . . 41

VI. Is this Alceste? . . . . . . . . 53

VII. On the Bridge . . . . . . . . . 62

VIII. A "Helper of unhappy Men" . . . . . . 74

IX. In Society . . . . . . . . . 81

X. "The Poet in a Golden Age was born" . . . . 91

XI. The Gay Science in a new Illustration . . . 99

XII. "Love, the Messenger of Death" . . . . . 110

XIII. A Man of the Time . . . . . . . . 122

XIV. A Midnight Confidence . . . . . . . 132

XV. A Morning Confidence . . . . . . . 141

XVI. Chastelard . . . . . . . . . 151

XVII. "Under Bonnybell's Window-panes" . . . . 162

XVIII. "Counsel bewrayed" . . . . . . . . 169

XIX. Mr. St. Paul's Mystery . . . . . . . 177

CHAPTER PAGE
XX. Love and Electioneering . . . . . . 188
XXI. An Episode . . . . . . . . . 195
XXII. Mr. Sheppard's Offer of Surrender . . . 204
XXIII. "Mischief, thou art afoot" . . . . . . 215
XXIV. All the Rivals at once . . . . . . 225
XXV. Victor—Proposition? . . . . . . . 233
XXVI. "Luckless Love's Interpreter". . . . . 241
XXVII. "Was ever Woman in this Humour wooed?" . . 249
XXVIII. The Member for Keeton . . . . . . 260
XXIX. A Lounge in the Park . . . . . . 271
XXX. "Lean'd her Breast up till a Thorn" . . . 280
XXXI. "And even for Love will bury Love in Earth" . 287
XXXII. Left lonely . . . . . . . . . 297
XXXIII. The Man without a Grievance . . . . 304
XXXIV. "He wrung Bassanio's Hand, and so they parted" . 314
XXXV. A general Breaking-up . . . . . . 321
XXXVI. "Where I did begin there shall I end" . . 335

# MISS MISANTHROPE.

## CHAPTER I.

### MISS MISANTHROPE.

THE little town of Dukes-Keeton, in one of the more northern of the midland counties, had in its older days two great claims to consideration. One was a park, the other a sweetmeat. The noble family whose name had passed through many generations of residence at the place had always left their great park so freely open to every one that it came to be like the common property of the public; and the town had grown into fame by the manufacture of the sweetmeat which bore its name almost everywhere in the track of the meteor-flag of England. But as time went on various other places took to manufacturing the sweetmeat so much better, and selling it so much more successfully than "Keeton," as the town was commonly called, could do, that "Keeton" itself had long since retired from the business, and was content to import the delicacy, which still bore its own name, in consignments of canisters from Manchester or London. During many years the heir of the noble family had deserted the park, and had never come near it or near England even, and everything that gave the town a distinct reason for existence seemed to be passing rapidly into tradition. It had lain out of the track of the railway system for a long time, and when the railway system at length enclosed it in its arms the attention seemed to have come too late. All the heat of life appeared to have chilled out of Dukes-Keeton in the meantime, and it lay now between two railways almost as inanimate and hopeless a lump as the child to whom the Erl-king's touch is fatal in his father's arms.

The park, with its huge palace-like, barrack-like house, not a castle, and too great to be called merely a hall, lies almost immediately outside the town. From streets and shops the visitor passes straightway through the gates of the great enclosure.

Every stranger who has seen the house is taken at once to see another object of interest. In the centre of the park was a broad clear space, made by the felling and removing of every tree, until it spread there sharp and hard as a burnt-out patch in a forest. Gravel and small shells made the pavement of this space, and thus formed a new contrast with the turf, the grasses, and the underwood of the park all around. In the midst of this open space there rose a large circular building: a tower, low in height when the bulk enclosed by its circumference was considered, and standing on a great square platform of solid masonry with steps on each of its sides. The tower itself reminded one of the tomb of Cecilia Métella, or some other of the tombs that still stand near Rome. It was, in fact, the mausoleum which it had pleased the father of the present owner to have erected for himself during his lifetime. He lavished money on it, cared nothing for the cost of materials and labour, planned it out himself, watched every detail, and stood by the workmen as they toiled. Within he had prepared a lordly reception-room for his dead body when he should come to die. A superb sarcophagus of porphyry, fit to have received the remains of a Cæsar, was there. When the work was done and all was ready the lonely owner visited it every day, unlocked its massive gate, and went in, and sat sometimes for hours in his own mausoleum. He was growing insane, people thought, in these later days, and they counted on his soon becoming an actual madman. So far, however, he showed no greater madness than in wasting his money on a huge tomb, and wasting so much of his time in visiting it prematurely. The tomb proved a vanity in a double sense. For the noble owner was seized with a sudden mania for travel, and resolved to go round the world. Somewhere in mid-ocean he was attacked by fever, or what alarmed people called the plague, and he died, and his body had to be committed without much delay or ceremonial to the sea. He had built his monument to no purpose. He was never to occupy it. It stood a vast and solid gibe at the vanity of its founder.

Over the great gate through which the mausoleum was entered were three heads sculptured in stone. One was that of a man in the prime of manhood, with lips and eyebrows contracted and puckered, forehead wrinkled, and eyes full of anxious strain, all telling of care, of pain, of sleepless struggle against difficulty, watchfulness to ward off danger. This was life. The next was the face of the same man with the eyes closed and the cheeks sunken, and the expression of one who had fallen into sleep from pain—the struggle and agony gone indeed, but their shadow still resting on the brows and the lips : and that of course was Death. The third piece of carving showed the same face still, but now with clear eyes looking broadly and brightly forward, and with features all noble, serene, and glad. This was Eternity. These three faces were the wonder and admiration of the neighbourhood, and had been for now some years back employed to solve the problem of existence for all the little lads and lasses of Keeton who might otherwise have failed sometimes to see the harmonious purpose working in all things. The sculptor had it all his own way, and took care that Life should have the worst of it. Keeton was in almost all its conditions a place of rather sleepy contentment, and its people could be trusted to take just as much of the moral as was good for them, and not to carry to extremes the lesson as to the discomfort and dissatisfaction of the probationary life-period. Otherwise there might perhaps be a chance that impressionable, not to say morbid, persons would desire to hurry very rapidly through the dark and anxious vestibule of Life in order to get into the broad bright temple of Eternity.

Some thought like this was passing through the mind of Miss Minola Grey, who sat on the steps of the tomb and looked up into the faces illustrative of man's struggle and final success. Life had long been wearing a hard and difficult appearance to her, and she would perhaps have been glad enough sometimes if she could have got into the haven of quiet waters which in the minds of so many people and in so many symbolic representations is made to stand for Eternity. She was a handsome, graceful girl, rather tall, fair-haired, with deep blueish-grey eyes which seemed to darken as they looked earnestly at any one—eyes which might be described in Matthew Arnold's words as "too expressive to be blue, too lovely to be grey"—with a broad forehead from which the hair was thrown back in disregard of passing fashions. Perhaps it was her attitude, as she leaned her chin upon her hand and looked up at the mausoleum—perhaps it was the presence of that gloomy building itself—that made her face seem like an illustration of melancholy. Certainly her face was pale and a little wanting in fullness, and the lips were of the sort that one can always think of as tremulous with emotion of some kind. This was a beautiful summer evening, and all the park around was green, sunny, and glad. The little dry, bare spot on which the tomb was built seemed like a grey and withering leaf on a bright branch. And the figure of the girl was more in keeping with the melancholy shadow of the mausoleum than the joyousness of the sun and the trees and the whole scene all around.

Indeed there was a good deal of melancholy in the girl's mind at that moment. She was taking leave of the place: she had come to say it a farewell. That park had been her playground, her studio, her stage, her world of fancy and romance and poetry since her infancy. She had driven her brother as a horse there, and had played with him at hunting lions. She had studied landscape drawing there from the days when a half staggery stroke with some blotches out of it was supposed to represent a tree, and a thing shaped like the trade mark on Mr. Bass's beer bottles stood for a mountain. As she grew up, she came there to read and to idle and to think. There she revelled in all the boundless fancies and extravagant ambitions of a clever, half-poetic child. There she was in turn the heroine of every book that delighted her, and the heroine of stories which had never been put into print. Heroes of surpassing beauty, strength, courage, and devotion, had rambled under these trees for years with her, nor had the new comer's presence ever been made a cause of jealousy or complaint by the one whom his coming displaced. They were a strange procession of all complexions and garbs. Achilles the golden-haired had been with her in his day, and so had the melancholy Master of Ravenswood; and the young Djalma, the lover of Adrienne, of the "Juif Errant," forgotten of English girls to-day; and Nello, the proud gondolier lad with the sweet voice, who was loved by the mother and the daughter of the Aldinis; and the unnamed youth who went mad for Maud; and Henry Esmond, and Stunning Warrington, and Jane Eyre's Rochester, and ever so many else. Each and all of these in turn loved her, and was passionately loved by her, and all had done great things for her; and for each she had done far greater things. She had made them victorious, crowned them with laurels, died for them. It was a peculiarity of her temperament that when she read some pathetic story it was not at the tragic passages that her tears came. It was not the deaths that touched her most. It was when she read of bold and generous things suddenly done, of splendid self-sacrifice, of impossible rescue and superhuman heroism, that she could not keep down her feelings and was glad when only the watching untell-tale trees could see the tears in her eyes.

She had, however, two heroes chief over all the rest whose story she found it impossible to keep apart, and whom she blended commonly into one odd compound. These were Hamlet and Alceste, the "Misanthrope" of Molière. It was sometimes Alceste who offered to be buried quick with Ophelia in the grave; and it was often Hamlet who interjected his scraps of poetic cynicism between the pretty and scandalous prattlings of Célimène and her petticoaterie. But perhaps Alceste came nearest to the heart of our young maid as she grew up. She said to herself over and over again that "C'est n'estimer rien qu'estimer tout le monde." She refused "d'un cœur la vaste complaisance qui ne fait de mérite aucune différence," and declared that "pour le trancher net, l'ami du genre humain n'est point du tout mon fait." No doubt there was unconscious or only half conscious affectation in this, as there is in the ways of almost all young people who are fond of reading: and her way of thinking herself a girl-Alceste would probably have vanished with other whims, or been supplanted by fancies of imitation caught from other models, if everything had gone well with her. But several causes conspired as she grew into a woman to make her think very seriously that Alceste was not wrong in his general estimate of men and their merits. She was intensely fond of her mother, and when her mother died her father married again, his second wife being a young woman who put him under the most absolute control, being not by any means an ill-natured person, but only strong-willed, serene, and stupid. Then her brother, to whom she was devoted, and who was her absolute confidant, went away to Canada, declaring he would not stand a stepmother, and that as soon as his sister grew old enough to put away domestic control he would send for her; and he soon got married and became a prominent member of the Dominion Legislature, and in none of his not over-frequent letters said a word about his promise to send for her. Now her father was some time dead; her stepmother had married Mr. Saulsbury, an elderly Nonconformist minister, who was shocked at all the ways of Alceste's admirer, and with whom she could not get on. It would take a very sweet and resigned nature to make one who had had these experiences absolutely in love with the human race, and especially with men; and Alceste accordingly became more dear than ever to Miss Grey.

Now she was about to leave the place and to open of her own accord a new chapter of life. She had to escape at once from the dislike of some and the still less endurable liking of others. She was determined to go, and yet as she looked around upon the place and all its dear sweet memories filled her, it is no wonder if she envied the calmness of the face that symbolised eternal rest. At last she broke down and covered her face with her hands and gave herself up to tears.

Her quick ears, however, heard sounds which she knew were not those of the rustling woods. She started to her feet and dried her eyes hastily. Straight before her now there lay the long broad path through the trees which led up to the gate of the mausoleum. The air was so exquisitely pure and still that the footfall of a person approaching could be distinctly heard by the girl although the newcomer was yet far away. She could see him, however, and recognise him, and she had no doubt that he had seen her. A thought of escape at first occurred to her; but she gave it up in a moment, for she knew that the person approaching had come to seek her, and must have seen her before she saw him. So she sat down again defiantly and waited. She did not look his way, although he raised his hat to her more than once.

As he comes near we can see that he is a handsome, rather stiff-looking man, with full formal dark whiskers, clearly cut face, and white teeth. His hat is very shiny. He wears a black frock coat buttoned across the chest, and dark trousers and dainty little boots and grey gloves, and has a diamond pin in his neck-tie. He is Mr. Augustus Sheppard, a very considerable person indeed in the town. Dukes-Keeton, it should be said, has three classes or estates. The noble owners of the park and the guests whom they used to bring to visit them in their hospitable days made one estate. The upper class of the town made another estate; and the working people and the poor generally made the third. These three classes (there were at present only two of them represented in Keeton) were divided by barriers which it never occurred to any imagination to think of getting over. Mr. Augustus Sheppard was a leading man among the townspeople. His father was a solicitor and a land-agent of old standing, and Mr. Augustus followed his father's profession, and now did by far the greater part of its work. He was a member of the Church of England of course, but he made it part of his duty to be on the best terms with the Dissenters, for Keeton was growing to be very strong in Dissent of late years. Mr. Augustus Sheppard had done a great deal for the mental and other improvement of the town. It was he who got up the Mutual Improvement Society, and made himself responsible for the rent of the hall in which the winter course of lectures, organised by him, used to take place; and he always gave a lecture himself every season, and he took the chair very often and introduced other lecturers. He always worked most cordially with the Reverend Mr. Saulsbury in trying to restrict the number of public-houses, and he was one of the few persons whom Mrs. Saulsbury cordially admired. He had a word of formal kindness for every one, and was never heard to say an ill-natured thing of any one behind his or her back. He was vaguely believed to be ambitious of worldly success, but only in a proper and becoming way, and far-seeing people looked forward to finding him one day in the House of Commons.

As he came near the mausoleum he raised his hat again, and then the girl acknowledged his salute and stood up.

"A very lovely evening, Miss Grey."

"Yes," said Miss Grey, and no more.

"I have been at your house, Miss Grey, and saw your people; and I heard that possibly you were in the park. I thought perhaps you would have been at home. When I saw you last night you seemed to believe that you would be at home all the day." This was said in a gentle tone of implied reproach.

"*You* spoke then of walking in the park, Mr. Sheppard."

"And I have kept my word, you see," Mr. Sheppard said, not observing the implied reason for her change of purpose.

"Yes, I see it now," she answered, as one who should say "I did not count upon it then."

Of all men else, Minola Grey would have avoided him. She knew only too well what he had come for. She would perhaps have disliked him for that in any case, but she certainly disliked him on his own account. His formal and heavy manners impressed her disagreeably, and she liked to say things that puzzled and startled him. It was a pleasure to her to throw some paradox or odd saying at him and watch his awkward attempts to catch it, and then while he was just on the point of getting at some idea of it to bewilder him with some new enigma. To her he seemed to be what he was not, simply a sham, a heavy piece of hypocrisy. Formalism and ostentatious piety she recognised as part of the business of a Nonconformist minister, in whom they were excusable, as his grave garb would be, but they seemed insufferably out of place when adopted by a layman and a man of the world who was still young.

"I am glad to have found you at last," Mr. Sheppard said, with a grave smile.

"You might have found me at first," Minola said, quoting from Artemus Ward, "if you had come a little sooner, Mr. Sheppard. I have only lately escaped here."

"I wish I had known, and I would have come a great deal sooner. May I take the liberty of sitting beside you?"

"I am going to stand, Mr. Sheppard, but that need not prevent you from sitting."

"I should not think of sitting unless you do. Shall we walk a little among the trees? This is a gloomy spot for a young lady."

"I prefer to stand here for a little, Mr. Sheppard, but don't let me keep you from enjoying a walk."

"Enjoying a walk?" he said, with a grave smile and solemn emphasis. "Enjoying a walk, Miss Grey—— and without you?"

She deliberately avoided meeting the glance with which he was endeavouring to give additional meaning to this polite speech. She knew that he had come to make love to her; and though she was longing to have the whole thing done with, as it must be settled one way or the other, she detested and dreaded the ordeal, and would have put it off if she could. So she did not give any sign of having understood or even heard his words, and the opportunity for going on with his purpose, which he had hoped to extract, was lost for the moment. In truth, Mr. Sheppard was afraid of this girl, and she knew it, and liked him none the more for it.

"I have been studying something with great interest, Mr. Sheppard," she began, as if determined to cut him off from his chance for the present. "I have made a discovery."

"Indeed, Miss Grey? Yes—I saw that you were in deep contemplation as I came along, and I wondered within myself what could have been the subject of your thoughts."

She coloured a little and looked suddenly at him, asking herself whether he could have seen her tears. His face, however, gave no explanation, and she felt assured that he had not seen them.

"I have found, Mr. Sheppard, that some of the weaknesses of men are alive in the insect world."

"Indeed, Miss Grey? Some of the affections of men do indeed live, we are told, in the insect world. So beautifully ordained is everything"——

"The affectations I meant, not the affections of men, Mr. Sheppard. Could you ever have believed that an insect would be capable of a deliberate attempt at imposture?"

"I should certainly not have looked for anything of the kind, Miss Grey. But there is unfortunately so much of evil mixed up with all"——

"So there is. I was going to tell you that as I came here and passed through the garden my attention was directed—is not that the proper way to put it?"——

"To put it, Miss Grey?"

"Yes; my attention was directed to a large, heavy, respectable blue-bottle fly. He kept flying from flower to flower and burying his stupid head in every one in turn and making a ridiculous noise. I watched his movements for a long time. It was evident to the meanest understanding that he was trying to attract attention and was hoping the eyes of the world were on him. You should have seen his pretence at enjoying the flowers and drinking in sweetness from them—and he stayed longest on the wrong flowers!"

"Dear me! Now why did he do that?"

"Because he didn't know any better, and he was trying to make us think he did."

"But, Miss Grey—a fly—a blue-bottle! Now really—how did you know what he was thinking of?"

"I watched him closely—and I found him out at last. Have you not guessed what the meaning of the whole thing was?"

"Well, Miss Grey, I can't say that I quite understand it just yet; but I am sure I shall be greatly interested in hearing the explanation."

"It was simply the imposture of a blue-bottle trying to pass himself off as a bee! It was man's affectation put under the microscope!"

Mr. Sheppard looked up at her in the hope of catching from her face some clear intimation as to whether she was in jest or earnest and demeaning himself accordingly. But her eyes were cast down, and he could not make out the riddle. Driven by desperation, he dashed in, to prevent the possible propounding of another before he had time to come to his point.

"All the professions of men are not affectations, Miss Grey! Oh no: far from it indeed. There are some feelings in our breasts which are only too real!"

She saw that the declaration was coming now and must be confronted.

"I have long wished for an opportunity of revealing to you some of my feelings, Miss Grey, and I hope the chance has now arrived. May I speak?"

"I can't prevent you from speaking, Mr. Sheppard."

"You will hear me?"

He was in such fear of her and so awkward about the terms of his declaration of love that he kept clutching at every little straw that seemed to give him something to hold on to for a moment's rest and respite.

"I had better hear you, I suppose," she said, with an air of profound depression, "if you will go on, Mr. Sheppard. But if you would please me, you would stop where you are and say no more."

"You know what I am going to say, Miss Grey—you must have known it this long time. I have asked your natural guardians and advisers, and they encourage me to speak. Oh, Miss Grey—I love you—may I hope that I may look forward to the happiness of one day making you my wife?"

It was all out now, and she was glad. The rest would be easy. He looked even then so prosaic and formal that she did not believe in any of his professed emotions, and she was therefore herself unmoved.

"No, Mr. Sheppard," she said, looking calmly at him, straight in the face. "Such a day will never come. Nothing that I have seen in life makes me particularly anxious to be married; and I could not marry you."

He had expected evasion, but not bluntness. He knew well enough that the girl did not love him, but he had believed that he could persuade her to marry him. Now her point-blank refusal completely staggered him.

"Why not, Miss Grey?" was all he could say at first.

"Because, Mr. Sheppard, I really much prefer not to marry you."

"There is not anyone else?" he asked, his face for the first time showing emotion and anger.

The faint light of a melancholy smile crossed Minola's face. He grew more angry.

"Miss Grey—now, you must tell me that! I have a right to ask—yes: and your people would expect me to ask. You must tell me *that*."

"Well," she said, "if you force me to it, and if you will have an answer, I must give you one, Mr. Sheppard. I have a lover already, and I mean to keep him."

Mr. Sheppard was positively shocked by the suddenness and coolness of this revelation. He recovered himself, however, and took refuge in unbelief.

"Miss Grey, you don't mean it, I know—I can't believe it. Why, I have known you and seen you grow up since you were a child. Mrs. Saulsbury couldn't but know"——

"Mrs. Saulsbury knows nothing of me: we know nothing of each other. I *have* a lover, Mr. Sheppard, for all that—do you want to know his name?"

"I should like to know his name, certainly," the breathless Sheppard stammered out.

"His name is Alceste"——

"A Frenchman!" Sheppard was aghast.

"A Frenchman, truly—a French gentleman—a man of truth and courage and spirit and honour and everything good. A man who wouldn't tell a lie or do a mean thing, or flatter a silly woman, or persecute a very unhappy girl—no, not to save his soul, Mr. Sheppard. Do you happen to know any such man?"

"No such man lives in Keeton." He was surprised into simple earnestness. "At least I don't know of any such man."

"No; you and he are not likely to come together and be very familiar. Well, Mr. Sheppard, that is the man to whom I am engaged, and I mean to keep my engagement. You can tell Mrs. Saulsbury if you like."

"But you haven't told me his other name."

"Oh—I don't know his other name."

"Miss Grey! Don't know his other name?"

"No: and I don't think he has any other name. He has but the one name for me, and I don't want any second."

"Where does he live, then—may I ask?"

"Oh yes—I may as well tell you all now, since I have told you so much. He only lives in a book, Mr. Sheppard; in what you would call a play," she added with contemptuous expression.

"Oh, come now—I thought you were only amusing yourself." A smile of reviving satisfaction stole over his face. "I'm not much afraid of a rival like that, Miss Grey—if he is my only rival."

"I don't know why you talk of a rival," the young woman answered, with a scornful glance at him; "but I can assure you he would be the most dangerous rival a living man could have. When I find a man like him, Mr. Sheppard, I hope he will ask me to marry him; indeed, when I find such a man I'll ask him to marry me—and if he be the man I take him for he'll refuse me. I have told you all the truth now, Mr. Sheppard, and I hope you will think I need not say any more."

"Still I'm not quite without hope that something may be done," Mr. Sheppard said. "How if I were to study your hero's ways and try to be like him, Miss Grey?"

A great brown heavy velvety bee at the moment came booming along, his ponderous flight almost level with the ground and not far above it. He sailed in and out among the trees and branches, now burying himself for a few seconds in some hollow part of a trunk and then plodding through air again.

"Do you think it would be of any use, Mr. Sheppard," she calmly asked, "if that honest bee were to study the ways of the eagle?"

"You are not complimentary, Miss Grey," he said, reddening.

"No: I don't believe in compliments: I very much prefer truth."

"Still there are ways of conveying the truth—and of course I never professed to be anything very great and heroic"——

He was decidedly hurt now.

"Mr. Sheppard," she said, in a softer and more appealing tone, "I don't want to quarrel with you or with anybody, and please don't drive me on to make myself out any worse than I am. I don't care about you, and I never could. We never could get on together. I don't care for any man—I don't like men at all. I wouldn't marry you if you were an emperor. But I don't say anything against you;

at least I wouldn't if you would only let me alone. I am very unhappy sometimes—almost always now; but at least I mean to make no one unhappy but myself."

"That's what comes of books and poetry and solitary walks and nonsense! Why can't you listen to the advice of those who love you?"

She turned upon him angrily again.

"Well, I am not speaking of myself now, but of your—your people, who only desire your good. Mr. Saulsbury, Mrs. Saulsbury"——

"Once for all, Mr. Sheppard, I shall not take their advice; and if you would have me think of you with any kindness at all, any memory not disagreeable and—and detestable, you will not talk to me of their advice. Even if I had been inclined to care for you, Mr. Sheppard, you took a wrong way when you came in their name and talked of their authority. Next time you ask a girl to marry you, Mr. Sheppard, do it in your own name."

He caught eagerly at the kind of negative hope that seemed to be held out to him.

"If that's an objection," he began, "I assure you that I came quite of my own motion, and I am the last man in the world to endeavour to bring any unfair means to bear. Of course it is not as if they were your own parents, and I can quite understand how a young lady must feel"——

"I don't know much of how young ladies feel," Minola said quietly, "but I know how I feel, Mr. Sheppard, and you know it too. Take my last word. I'll never marry you. You only waste your time, and perhaps the time of somebody else as well—some good girl, Mr. Sheppard, who would be glad to marry you and whom you will be quite ready to make love to the day after to-morrow."

Her heart was hardened against him now, for she thought him mean and craven and unmanly. Perhaps according to her familiar creed she ought rather to have thought him manly, meanness being man's proper attribute. She did not believe in the genuineness of his love, and in any case no thought was more odious to her than that of a man pressing a girl to marry him if she did not love him and was not ready to meet him half way.

There was a curious contrast between these two figures as they stood on the steps of that great empty tomb. The contrast was all the more singular and even the more striking because the two might easily have been described in such terms as would seem to suggest no contrast. If they were described as a handsome young man (for he was scarcely more than thirty) and a handsome young woman the description would be correct. He was rather tall, she was rather tall; but he was formal, severe, respectable, and absolutely unpicturesque—she was picturesque in every motion. His well-made clothes sat stiffly on him, and the first idea he conveyed was that he was carefully dressed. Even a woman would not have thought, at the first glance at least, of how she was dressed. She only impressed one with a sense of the presence of graceful and especially emotional womanhood. The longer one looked at the two the deeper the contrast seemed to become. Both, for example, had rather thin lips; but his were rigid, precise, and seeming to part with a certain deliberation and even difficulty. Hers appeared, even when she was silent, to be tremulous with expression. After a while it would have seemed to an observer, if any observing eye were there, that no power on earth could have brought these two into companionship.

"I won't take this as your final answer," he said, after one or two unsuccessful efforts to speak. "You will consider this again, and give it some serious reflection."

She only shook her head, and once more seated herself on the steps of the monument, as if to suggest that now the interview was over.

"You are not walking homeward?" he asked.

"I am staying here for awhile."

He bade her good morning and walked slowly away. A rejected lover looks to great disadvantage when he has to walk away. He ought to leap on the back of a horse, and spur him fiercely and gallop off; or the curtain ought to fall and so finish up with him. Otherwise, even the most heroic figure has something of the look of one sneaking off like a dog told imperatively to "go home." Mr. Sheppard felt very uncomfortable at the thought that he probably did not seem dignified in the eyes of Miss Grey. He once glanced back uneasily, but perhaps it was hardly a relief to find that she was not looking in his direction.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE EVE OF LIBERTY.

Miss Grey remained in the park until the sun had gone down, and the stars, with their faint light, seemed as she moved homeward to be like bright sparkles entangled among the higher branches of the trees. She had a great deal to think of, and she troubled herself little about the mental depression of her rejected lover. All the purpose of her life was now summed up in a resolve to get away from Keeton and to bury herself in London.

She knew that any opposition to her proposal on the part of those who were still supposed to be her guardians would only be founded on an objection to it as something unwomanly, venturous, and revolutionary, and not by any means the result of any grief for her going away. Ever since her mother's death and her father's second marriage she had only chafed at existence, and found those around her disagreeable, and, no doubt, made herself disagreeable to them. She had ceased to feel any respect for her father when he married again, and he knew it and became cold and constrained with her. Only just before his death had there been anything like a revival of their affection for each other. He had been a man of some substance and authority in his town, had built houses, and got together property, and he left his daughter a not inconsiderable annuity as a charge upon his property, and placed her under the guardianship of the elderly and respectable Nonconformist minister, who, as luck would have it, afterwards married his young widow. Minola had seen so many marriages during her short experience, and had disliked two at least of them so thoroughly, that she was much inclined to say with one of her heroes that there should be no more of them. For a long time she had made up her mind that when she came of age she would go to London and live there. She still wanted a few months of the time of independence, but the manner in which Mr. Augustus Sheppard was pressed upon her by himself and others made her resolve to anticipate the course of the seasons a little, and go away at once. In London she made up her mind that she would lead a life of enchantment: of delightful and semi-savage solitude, in the midst of the crowd; of wild independence and scorn of all the ways of men, with books at her command, with the art galleries and museums, of which she had read so much, always within easy reach, and the streets which were alive for her with such sweet and dear associations all around her.

Miss Grey knew London well. She had never yet set foot in it, or been anywhere out of her native town; but she had studied London as a general may study the map of some country which he expects one day to invade. Many and many a night, when all in the house but she were fast asleep, she had had the map of London spread out before her, and had puzzled her way through endless intricacies of its streets. Few women of her age, or of any age, actually living in the metropolis, had anything like the knowledge of its districts and its principal streets that she had. She felt in anticipation the pride and delight of being able to go whither she would about London without having to ask her way of anyone. Some particular association identified every place in her mind. The living and the dead, the romantic and the real, history and fiction, all combined to supply her with labels of association, which she might mentally put upon every quarter and district, and almost upon every street which had a name worth knowing. As we all know Venice before we have seen it, and when we get there can recognise everything we want to see without need of guide to name it for us, so Minola Grey knew London. It is no wonder now that her mind was in a perturbed condition. She was going to leave the place in which so far all her life, literally, had been passed. She was going to live in that other place which had for years been her dream, her study, her self-appointed destiny. She was going to pass away for ever from uncongenial and odious companionship, and to live a life of sweet, proud, lonely independence.

The loneliness, however, was not to be literal and absolute. In all romantic adventures there is companionship. The knight has his squire, Rosalind has her Celia. Minola Grey was to have her companion in her great enterprise. It had not occurred to her to think about the inconvenience or oddness of a girl living absolutely alone in London, but without any forethought on her part the kindly destinies had provided her with a comrade. Having lingered long in the park and turned back again and again for another view of some favourite spot, having gathered many a leaf and flower for remembrance, and having looked up many times with throbbing heart at the white, trembling stars that would shine upon her soon in London, Miss Grey at last made up her mind and passed resolutely out at the great gate and went to seek this companion. She was glad to leave the park now in any case, for in the fine evenings of summer and autumn it was the custom of Keeton people to make it their promenade. All the engaged couples of the place would soon be seen there under the trees. When a lad and lass were seen to walk boldly and openly together of evenings in that park, and to pass and repass their neighbours without effort at avoiding such encounters, it was as well known that they were engaged as though the fact had been proclaimed by the town-crier. A jury of Keeton folk would have assumed a promise of marriage and proceeded to award damages for its breach if it were proved that a young man had walked openly for any three evenings in the park with a girl whom he afterwards declined to make his wife. Minola did not care to meet any of the joyous couples or their friends, and even already the twitter of voices and the titter of feminine laughter were beginning to make themselves heard among the darkling paths and across the broad green lanes of the park.

From the gates of the park one passed, as has been said already, almost directly into the town. The town itself was divided in twain by a river, the river spanned by a bridge which had a certain fame from the fact of its having been the scene of a brave stand and a terrible slaughter during the Civil Wars after Charles the First had set up his standard at Nottingham. To be sure there was not much left of the genuine old bridge on which the fight was fought, nor did the broad, flat, handsome, and altogether modern structure bear much resemblance to the sort of bridge which might have crossed a river in the days of the Cavaliers. Residents of Keeton always, however, boasted of the fact that one of the arches of the bridge was just the same underneath as it had always been, and insisted on bringing the stranger down by devious and grassy paths to the river's edge in order that he might see for himself the old stones still holding together which had perhaps been shaken by the tramp of Rupert's troopers. On the park side of the bridge lay the genteeller and more pretentious houses, the semi-detached villas and lodges and crescents of Keeton; and there, too, were the humbler cottages. On the other side of the bridge were the business streets and the clustering shops, most of them old-fashioned and dark, with low beetling fronts and narrow panes in the windows, and only here and there a showy and modern establishment, with its stucco front and its plate glass. The streets were all so narrow that they seemed as if they must be only passages leading to broader thoroughfares. The stranger walked on and on, thinking he was coming to the actual town of Dukes-Keeton, until he walked out at the other side and found he had left it behind him.

Minola Grey crossed the bridge, although her own home lay on the side nearest the park, and made her way through the narrow streets. She glanced with a shudder at one formal official-looking house of dark brick which she had to pass, and the door of which bore a huge brass plate with the words "Sheppard and Sheppard, Solicitors and Land Agents." Another expression of dislike or pain crossed her handsome, pale, and emotional face when she passed a little lane, closed at the farther end by the heavy sombre front of a chapel, for it was there that she had even still to pass some trying unsympathetic hours of the Sunday listening to a preacher whose eloquence was rather too familiar to her all the week. At length she passed the front of a large building of light-coloured stone, with a Greek portico and row of pillars and high flight of steps, and which to the eye of any intelligent mortal had "Court House" written on its very face. Miss Grey went on and passed its front entrance, then turning down a narrow street of which the building itself formed one side, she came to a little open door, went in, ran lightly up a flight of stone steps, and found herself in dun and dimly lighted corridors of stone.

A ray or two of the evening light still flickered through the small windows of the roof. But for this all would seemingly have been dark. Minola's footfall echoed through the passages. The place appeared ghostly and sad, and the presence of youth, grace, and energetic womanhood was strangely out of keeping with all around. The whole expression and manner of Miss Grey brightened, however, as she passed along these gaunt and echoing corridors. In the sunlight of the park there seemed something melancholy in the face of the girl which was not in accord with her years, her figure, and her deep soft eyes. Now in this dismal old passage of damp resounding stone she seemed so joyous that her passing along might have been that of another Pippa. The place was not very unlike a prison, and an observer might have been pleased to think that, as the light step of the girl passed the door of each cell and the flutter of her garments was faintly heard, some little gleam of hope, some gentle memory, some breath of forgotten woods and fields, some softening inspiration of human love, was borne in to every imprisoned heart. But this was no prison: only the Court House where prisoners were tried; and its rooms, occupied in the day by judges, lawyers, policemen, public, suitors, and culprits, were now locked, empty, and silent.

Minola went on, singing to herself as she went, her song growing louder and bolder until at last it thrilled finely up to the stone roofs of the grim halls and corridors. For Minola was of that temperament to which resolve of any kind soon brings the excitement of high spirits, and she sang now out of sheer courage and purpose.

Presently she stopped at a low, dark, oaken door which looked as if it might admit to some dingy lumber-room or closet; and this door opened instantly and she was in presence of a pretty and cheerful little picture. The side of the building where the room was set looked upon the broadest and clearest space in the town, and through the open window could be seen distinctly the glassy grey of the quiet river and even the trees of the park, a dark mass beneath the pale summer sky. Although the room was lit only by the twilight, in which the latest lingering reflection of the sunset still lived, it looked bright to the girl who had come from the heavy dusk and gloom of the corridors with their roof-windows and their rows of grim doors. A room ought to look bright, too, when the visitor on just appearing on its threshold is rushed upon and clasped and kissed and greeted as "You dear dear darling." Such a welcome met Miss Grey, and then she was instantly drawn into the room, the door of which was closed behind her.

The occupant of the room who thus welcomed Minola was a woman not far short probably of forty years of age. She was short, she was decidedly growing fat, she had a face which ought from its outlines and its colour to be rather humorous and mirthful than otherwise, and a pair of very fine, deep, and consequently somewhat melancholy eyes. These eyes were the only beauty of Miss Mary Blanchet's face. She had not good sight, for all their brightness. When any one talked with her at some little distance across a room, or even across a broad table, he could easily see by the irresponsive look of the eyes—the eyes which never quite found a common focus with his even during the most animated interchange of thought—that Miss Blanchet had short sight. But Miss Blanchet always frankly and firmly declined to put on spectacles. "I have only my eyes to boast of, my dear," she said to all her female advisers, "and I am not going to cover them with ugly spectacles, you may be sure." Hers was a life of the simplest vanity, the most innocent affectation. Her eyes had driven her into poetry, love, and disappointment. She was understood to have loved very deeply and to have been deserted. None of her friends could quite remember the lover, but every one said that no doubt there must have been such a person. Miss Blanchet never actually spoke of him, but she somehow suggested his memory.

Miss Blanchet was a poetess. She had published by subscription a volume of verses, which was favourably noticed in the local newspapers and of which she sent a copy to the Queen, whereof Her Majesty had been kindly pleased to accept. Thus the poetess became a celebrity and a sort of public character in Dukes-Keeton, and when her father died it was felt that the town ought to do something for one who had done so much for it. It made her custodian of the Court House, entrusted with the charge of seeing that it was kept clean, ventilated, water-besprinkled, that when assizes came on the judges' rooms were fittingly adorned and that bouquets of flowers were placed every morning on the bench behind which they sat. This place Miss Blanchet had held for many years. The rising generation had forgotten all about her poetry, and indeed as she seldom went out of her own little domain had for the most part forgotten her existence.

When Minola Grey was a little girl her mother was one of Miss Mary Blanchet's chiefest patronesses. It was in great measure by the influence of Minola's father that Miss Blanchet obtained her place in the Court House. Little Minola thought her a great poetess and a remarkably beautiful woman, and accepted somehow the impression that she had a romantic and mysterious love history. It was a rare delight for her to be taken to spend an evening with Miss Blanchet, to drink tea in her pretty and well-kept little room, to walk with her through the stone passages of the Court House, and hear her repeat her poems. As Minola grew up she outgrew the poems, but the affection survived; and after her mother's death she found no congenial or sympathetic friend anywhere in Keeton but Mary Blanchet. The relationship between the two curiously changed. The tall girl of twenty became the leader, the heroine, the queen ; and Mary Blanchet, sensible little woman enough in many ways, would have turned African explorer or joined in a rebellion of women against men if Miss Grey had given her the word of command.

"I know your mind is made up, dear, now that you have come," Miss Blanchet said when the first rapture of greeting was over.

Minola took off her hat and threw it on the little sofa with the air of one who feels thoroughly at home. It may be remarked as characteristic of this young woman that in going towards the sofa she had to pass the chimney-piece with its mirror, and that she did not even cast a glance at her own image in the glass.

"Mary," she asked gravely, "am I a man and a brother that you expect me to change my mind? You are not repenting, I hope?"

"Oh no, my dear. I have all the advantages, you know. I am so tired of this place and the work—dear me!"

"And I hate to see you at such work. You might almost as well be a servant. Years ago I made up my mind to take you out of this wretched place as soon as I should be of age and my own mistress."

"Well, I have sent in my resignation, and I am free. But I am a little afraid about you. You have been used to every luxury—and the carriage—and all that."

"One of my ambitions is to drive in a hansom cab. Another is to have a latch-key. Both will soon be gratified. I am only sorry for one thing."

"What is that, dear?"

"That we can't be Rosalind and Celia; that I can't put on man's clothes and liberty."

"But you don't like men—you always want to avoid them."

Miss Grey said nothing in defence of her own consistency. She was thinking that if she had been a man she would have been spared the vexation of having to listen to Mr. Augustus Sheppard's proposals.

"I suspect," Miss Blanchet said, "that people will say we are more like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza."

"Which of us the Sancho?"

"Oh, I, of course; I am the faithful follower."

"You—poor little poetess, full of dreams and hopes and unselfishness! Why, I shall have to see that you get something to eat at tolerably regular intervals."

"How happy we shall be! And I shall be able to complete my poem! Do you know, Minola," she said, confidentially, "I do believe I shall be able to make a career in London. I do indeed! The miserable details of daily life here pressed me down, down," and she pressed her own hand upon her forehead to illustrate the idea. "There in freedom and quiet I do think I shall be able to prove to the world that I am worth a hearing!"

This was a tender subject with Miss Grey. She could not bear to disturb by a word the harmless illusion of her friend, and yet the almost fierce truthfulness of her nature would not allow her to murmur a sentence of unmeaning flattery.

"One word, Mary," she said; "if you grow famous, no marrying—mind!"

Little Miss Blanchet laughed and then grew sad, and cast her eyes down.

"Who would ask me to marry, my dearest? And even if they did the buried past would come out of the grave—and"—

She slightly raised both hands in deprecation of this mournful resurrection. Minola changed the subject and said:

"Well, I have all to go through with my people yet."

"They won't prevent you?" Miss Blanchet asked anxiously.

"They can't. In a few months I should be my own mistress; and what is the use of waiting? Besides, they don't really care—except for the sake of showing authority and proving to girls that they ought to be contented slaves. They know now that I am no slave. I do believe my esteemed stepfather—or step-stepfather, if there is such a word—would consent to emancipate me if he might do so with the proper ceremonial—the slap on the cheek."

The allusion was lost on Miss Blanchet.

"Mr. Saulsbury is a stern man indeed," she said, "but very good; that we must admit."

"All good men, it seems, are hard, and all soft men are bad."

"What of Mr. Augustus Sheppard?" Miss Blanchet asked gently. "How will he take your going away?"

"I have not asked him, Mary. But I can tell you if you care to know. He will take it with perfect composure. He has about as much capacity for foolish affection as your hearthbroom there."

"I think you are mistaken, Minola—I do indeed. I think that man is really"——

"Well. Is really what?"

"You won't be angry if I say it."

Minola seemed as if she were going to be angry, but she looked into the little poetess's kindly wistful eyes, and broke into a laugh.

"I couldn't be angry with you, Mary, if I had ten times my capacity for anger—and that would be a goodly quantity! Well, what is Mr. Sheppard really—as you were going to say?"

"Really in love with you, dear."

"You kind and believing little poetess—full of faith in simple true-love and all the rest of it! Mr. Sheppard likes what he considers a respectable connection in Keeton. Failing in one chance, he will find another, and there is an end of that."

"I don't think so," Miss Blanchet said gravely. "Well, we shall see."

"We shall not see *him* any more. We shall live a glorious, lonely independent life. I shall study humanity from some lofty garret window among the stars. London shall be my bark and my bride, as the old songs about the Rovers used to say. All the weaknesses of humanity shall reveal themselves to me in the people next door to us and over the way. I'll study in the British Museum! I'll spend hours in the National Gallery! I'll lie under the trees in Epping Forest! I *think* I'll go to the gallery of a theatre! *Liberté, liberté chérie*!" And Miss Grey proceeded to chant from the "Marseillaise" with splendid energy as she walked up and down the room with clasped hands of mock-heroic passion.

"You said something about a man and a brother just now, dear," Miss Blanchet gently interposed. "I have something to tell you about a man and a brother. *My* brother is back again in London."

Miss Blanchet made this communication in the tone of one who is trying to believe that the news will be welcome.

"Your brother? He has come back?" Miss Grey did not like to add "I am so sorry," but that was exactly what she would have said if she had spoken her mind.

"Yes, my dear—quite reformed and as steady as can be, and going to make a great name in London. Oh, you may trust to him this time, you may indeed."

Miss Grey's handsome and only too expressive features showed signs of profound dissatisfaction.

"I couldn't help telling him that we were going to live in London—one's brother, you know."

"Yes, one's brother," Miss Grey said, with sarcastic emphasis. "They are an affectionate race, these brothers! Then he knows all about our expedition? Has he been here, Mary?"

"Oh, no, dear; but he wrote to me—such beautiful letters! Perhaps you would like to read them?"

Miss Grey was silent, and was evidently fighting some battle with herself. At last she said—

"Well, Mary dear, it can't be helped, and I dare say he won't trouble to come very often to see *us*. But I hope he will come as often as you like, for you might be terribly lonely. I don't care to know anybody. I mean to study human nature, not to know people."

"But you have some friends in London, and you are going to see them."

"Oh—Lucy Money; yes. She was at school with me, and we used to be fond of each other. I think of calling to see her, but she may be changed ever so much, and perhaps we shan't get on together at all. Her father has become a sort of great man in London, I believe—I don't know how. They won't trouble us much, I dare say."

The friends then sat and talked for a short time about their project. It is curious to observe that though they were such devoted friends they looked on their joint purpose with very different eyes. The young woman, with her beauty, her spirit, and her talents, was absolutely sincere and single-minded, and was going to London with the sole purpose of living a free secluded life, without ambition, without thought of any manner of success. The poor little old maid had her head already filled with wild dreams of fame to be found in London, of a distinguished brother, a bright career, publishers seeking for everything she wrote, and her name often in the papers. Devoted as she was to Miss Grey, or perhaps because she was so devoted to her, she had already been forming vague but delightful hopes about the reformed brother which she would not now for all the world have ventured to hint to her friend.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MAN WITH A GRIEVANCE.

LATE that same night a young man stepped from a window in one of the rooms on the third floor of the Hôtel du Louvre in Paris, and stood in the balcony. It was a balcony in that side of the hotel which looks on the Rue de Rivoli. The young man smoked a cigar and leaned over the balcony.

It was a soft moonlight night. The hour was late and the streets were nearly silent. The latest omnibus had gone its way, and only now and then a rare and lingering *voiture* clicked and clattered along, to disappear round the corner of the place in front of the Palais Royal. The long line of gas lamps looking a faint yellow beneath the hotel and the Louvre Palace across the way seemed to deepen and deepen into redder sparks the farther the eye followed them to the right as they stretched on to the Place de la Concorde and the Champs Elysées. To the left the young man leaning from the balcony could see the Tower of St. Jacques standing darkly out against the faint pale blue of the moonlighted sky. The street was a line of silver or snow in the moonlight.

The young man was tall, thin, dark, and handsome. He was unmistakably English, although he had an excitable and nervous way about him which did not savour of British coolness and composure. He seemed a person not to take anything easily. Even the moonlight and the solitude and the indescribably soothing and philosophic influence of the contemplation of a silent city from the serene heights of a balcony did not prevail to take him out of himself into the upper ether of mental repose. He pulled his long moustaches now and then until they met like a kind of strap beneath his chin, and again he twisted their ends up as if he desired to appear fierce as a champion duellist of the Bonapartist group. He sometimes took his cigar from his lips and held it between his fingers until it went out, and when he put it into his mouth again he took several long puffs before he quite realised the fact that he was puffing at what one might term dry stubble. Then he pulled out a box of fusees and lighted his cigar in an irritated way, as if he were protesting that really the Fates were bearing down upon him rather too heavily, and that he was entitled to complain at last.

"Good evening, sir," said a strong full British voice that sounded just at his elbow.

The young man, looking round, saw that his next door neighbour in the hotel had likewise opened his window and stepped out on his balcony. The two had met before, or at least seen each other before once or twice. The young man had seen the elder with some ladies at breakfast in the hotel, and that evening he and his neighbour had taken coffee side by side on the boulevards and smoked and exchanged a few words.

The elder man's strong, rather undersized, figure showed very clearly in the moonlight. He had thick, almost shaggy, hair, of an indefinable dark brownish colour—hair that was not curly, that was not straight, that did not stand up, and yet could evidently never be kept down. He had a rough complexioned face, with heavy eyebrows and stubbly British whiskers. His hands were large and reddish-brown and coarse. He was dressed carelessly—that is, his clothes were evidently garments that had cost money, but he did not seem to care how he wore them. Any garment must fall readily into shapelessness and give up trying to fit well on that unheeding figure. The Briton did not seem exactly what one would at once assume to be a gentleman. Yet he was not vulgar, and he was evidently quite at his ease with himself. He looked somehow like a man who had money or power of some kind, and who did not care whether people knew it or did not know it. Our younger Briton had at the first glance taken him for the ordinary English father of a family, travelling with his womankind. But he had not seen him for two minutes at the breakfast-table before he observed that the supposed heavy father was never in a fuss, had a way of having all his orders obeyed without trouble or misunderstanding, and, for all his strong British accent, talked French with entire ease and a sort of resolute grammatical accuracy.

"Staying in Paris?" the elder man said—he too was smoking—when the younger had replied to his salutation.

"No; I am going home—I mean I am going to England—to-morrow."

"Aye, aye? I almost wish I were too. I'm taking my wife and daughters for a holiday. I don't much care for holidays myself. I hadn't time for enjoyment of such things when I could enjoy them, and of course when you get out of the way of enjoying yourself you never get into it again; it's a sort of groove, I suppose. Anyhow, we don't ever enjoy much, our people. You are English, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am English."

"Wish you weren't? I see."

Indeed the tone in which the young man answered the question seemed to warrant this interpretation.

"Excuse me; I didn't say that," the young man said, a little sharply.

"No, no; I only thought you meant it. We are not bound, you know, to keep rattling up the Rule Britannia always among ourselves."

"I can assure you I am not at all inclined to rattle the Rule Britannia too loudly," the young man said, tossing the end of his cigar away and looking determinedly into the street with his hands dug deeply into his pockets.

The elder man smoked for a few seconds in silence, and looked up and down the long straight line of street.

"Odd," he said abruptly. "I always think of Balzac when I look into the streets of Paris, and when I give myself time to think. Balzac sums up Paris for me."

"Yes," said the younger man, talking for the first time with an appearance of genuine interest in the conversation; "but things must be greatly changed since that time even in Paris, you know."

"Changed? Not a bit of it. The outsides, of course. The Louvre over there was half a ruin the other day, and now it's getting all right again. That's change, if you like to call it so. But the heart of things is just the same. Balzac stands for Paris, believe you me."

"I don't believe a word of it—not a word! I mean—excuse me—that I don't agree with you."

"Yes, yes: I understand what you mean. I'm not offended. Well?"

"Well—I don't believe a bit that men and women ever were like that. You mean to tell me that people were made without hearts in Paris or anywhere else? Do you believe in a place peopled by cads and sneaks and curs—and the women half again as bad as the men?"

The young man grew warm and the elder drew him out, and they discussed Balzac as they stood in the balcony and looked down on silent moonlighted Paris. The elder man smoked and smiled and shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly. The younger was as full of gesture and animation as if his life depended on the controversy.

"All right," the elder said at last. "I like to hear you talk, but Paris is Balzac to me still. Going to be in London some time?"

"I suppose so: yes," in a tone of sudden depression and discontent.

"I wish we might meet some time. I live in London, and

I wish you would come and see me when we get back from our—holiday, we'll call it."

The young man turned half away and leaned on the balcony as if he were looking very earnestly for something in the direction of the Champs Elysées. Then he faced his companion suddenly and said—

"I think you had much better not have anything to do with me; I should only prove a bore to you, or to anybody."

"How is that?"

"Well—in short, I'm a man with a grievance."

"Aye, aye? What's your grievance? Whom has it to do with?"

The young man looked up quickly as if he did not quite understand the brusque ways of his new acquaintance, who put his questions so directly. But the new acquaintance seemed good-humoured and quite at his ease, and evidently had not the least idea of being rude or over inquisitive. He had only the way of one apparently used to ordering people about.

"My grievance has to do with the Government," the young man said with a grave politeness, almost like self-assertion.

"Government here: in France?"

"No, no: our own Government."

"Aye, aye? What have they been doing? *You* haven't invented anything—new cannon—flying machine—that sort of thing?"

"No: nothing of that kind—I wish I had—but how did you know?"

"How did I know what?"

"That I hadn't invented anything."

"Why, I knew it by looking at you. Do you think I shouldn't know an inventor? You might as well ask me how I know a man has been in the army. Well, about this grievance of yours?"

"I dare say you will know my name," the young man said with a sort of reluctant modesty, which contrasted a little oddly with the quick movements and rapid talk that usually belonged to him. Then his manner suddenly changed and he spoke in a tone of something like irritation, as if he had better have the whole thing out at once, and be done with it—"My name is Heron—Victor Heron."

"Heron—Heron?" said the other, turning over the name in his memory. "Well, I don't know I am sure—I may have heard it—one hears all sorts of names. But I don't remember just at the moment."

Mr. Heron seemed a little surprised that his revelation had produced no effect. He had made up his mind somehow that his new friend was mixed up with politics and public affairs.

"You'll remember Victor Heron of the St. Xavier's Settlements?" he said decisively.

"Heron of the St. Xavier's Settlements? Ah, yes, yes. To be sure. Yes, I begin to remember now. Of course, of course. You're the fellow who got us into the row with the Portuguese or the Dutch, or who was it? About the slave trade, or something? I remember it in the House."

"I am the fool," Mr. Heron went on volubly—"the blockhead, the idiot, that thought England had principles, and honour, and a policy, and all the rest of it! I haven't lived in England very much. I'm the son of a colonist—the Herons are an old colonial family—and you can't think, you people always in England, how romantic and enthusiastic we get about England, we silly colonists, with our old-fashioned ways. When I got that confounded appointment—it was given in return for some old services of my father's—I believe I thought I was going to be another sort of Raleigh, or something of the kind."

"Just so; and of course you were ready to tumble into any sort of scrape. You were called over the coals—snubbed for your pains?"

"Yes—I was snubbed."

"Of course: they'll soon work the enthusiasm out of you. But that's a couple of years ago—and you weren't recalled?"

"No. I wasn't recalled."

"Well, what's your grievance then?"

"Why—don't you see?—my time is out—and they've dropped me down. My whole career is closed—I'm quietly thrown over—and I'm only twenty-nine!" The young man caught at his moustache with nervous hands and kicked with one foot against the rails of the balcony. He gazed into the street, and his eyes sparkled and twinkled as if there were tears in them. Perhaps there were, for Mr. Heron was evidently a young man of quicker emotions than young men generally show in our days. He made haste to say something, apparently as if to escape from himself.

"I am leaving Paris in the morning."

"Then why don't you go to bed and have a sleep?"

"Well, I don't feel like sleeping just yet."

"You young fellows never know the blessing of sleep. I can sleep whenever I want to—it's a great thing. I make it a rule though to do all my sleeping at night, whenever I can. You leave Paris in the morning? Now that's a thing I don't like to do. Paris should never be seen early in the morning. London shows to best advantage early ; but Paris—no ! "

"Why not?" Mr. Heron asked, stimulated to a little curiosity.

"Paris is a beauty, you know, a little on the wane, and wanting to be elaborately made up and curled and powdered and painted, and all that. She's a little of a slattern underneath the surface, you know, and doesn't bear to be taken unawares—mustn't be seen for at least an hour or two after she has got out of bed. All the more like Balzac's women."

Perhaps the elder man had observed Mr. Heron's sensitiveness more closely and clearly than Heron fancied, and was talking on only to give him time to recover his composure. Certainly he talked much more volubly and continuously than appeared at first to be his way. After a while he said, in his usual style of blunt but not unkindly inquiry—

"Any of your people living in London?"

"No—in fact I haven't any people in England—few relations now left anywhere."

"Like Melchisedek, eh? Well, I don't know that he was the most to be pitied of men. You have friends enough, I suppose?"

"Not friends exactly—acquaintances enough, I daresay—people to call on, people who remember one's name and who ask one to dinner. But I don't know that I shall have much time for cultivating acquaintanceships in the way of society."

"Why so? What are you going to London to do?"

"To get a hearing, of course. To make the whole thing known. To show that I was in the right, and that I only did what the honour of England demanded. I trust to England."

"What's England got to do with it? England is only so many men and women and children all concerned in their own affairs and not caring twopence about you and me and our wrongs. Besides, who has accused you? Who has found fault with you? Your time is out, and there's an end."

"But they have dropped me down—they think to crush me."

"If they do it will be by severely letting you alone : and what can you do against that? You can't quarrel with a man merely because he ceases to invite you to dinner : and that's about the way of it."

"I'll fight this out for all that."

"You'll soon get tired of it. It's beating the air, you know. Of course, if you want to annoy the Government you could easily get some of us to take up your case—no difficulty about that—

and make you the hero of a grievance and a debate and so on."

"I want nothing of the kind! I don't want any one to trouble himself about me, and I don't care to be taken in hand by any one. If Englishmen will not listen to a plain statement of right, why then—— But I know they will."

The conviction itself was expressed in the tone of one who by its very assertion protests against a rising doubt and tries to stifle it.

"Very good," said the other. "Try it on. We shall soon see. I have a sort of interest in the matter, for I had a grievance myself and I have still, only I went about things in a different way—looking for redress I mean."

"What did you do?"

"It's a longish story, and quite a different line from yours, and it would bore you to hear, even if you understood it. I got into the House and made myself a nuisance. I put money in my purse; it came in somehow. I watch the department that I once belonged to with the eye of a lynx. Well, I shall look out for you and give you a hand if I can, always supposing it would annoy the Government—any Government—I don't care what."

Mr. Heron looked at him with wonder and incredulity.

"Terrible lack of principle, you think? Not a bit of it; I'm a strong politician: I stick to my side through thick and thin. But in their management of departments, you know—contracts, and all that—Governments are all the same; the natural enemies of man. Well, I hope to see you. I am going to have a sleep. Let me give you my address—though in any case I think we are certain to meet."

They parted with blunt expression of friendly inclination on the one side and a doubtful, half-reluctant acknowledgment on the other. Heron remained standing in his balcony looking at the changes of the moonlight on the silent streets and thinking of his career and his grievance.

The nearer he came to England the colder his hopes seemed to grow. Now upon the threshold of the country he had so longed to reach he was inclined to linger and loiter and to put off his entrance. Everything that was so easy and clear a few thousand miles off began to show itself perplexed and difficult. "When shall I be there?" he used to ask himself on his homeward journey. "What have I come for?" he began to ask himself now.

Times had indeed changed very suddenly with Victor Heron.

He had come into the active world perhaps rather prematurely. When very young, under the guidance of an energetic and able father who had been an administrator of some distinction in England's service among her dependencies, he had made himself somewhat conspicuous in one of the colonies; and when an opportunity occurred, after his father's death, of offering him a considerable position, the Government appointed him to the administration of a new settlement. It is hardly necessary for us to go any deeper into the story of his grievance than he has already gone himself in a few words. Except as an illustration of his character, we have not much to do with the story of his career as an administrator. It was a very small business altogether; a quarrel in a far-off, lately appropriated, and almost wholly insignificant scrap of England's dominions. Probably Mr. Heron was in the wrong, for he had been stimulated wholly by a chivalrous enthusiasm for the honour of England's principles and a keen sense of what he considered justice. The Government had dealt very kindly with him in consideration of his youth and of his father's services, and had merely dropped him down.

This to a young man like Heron was simply killing with kindness. He could have stood up stoutly against impeachment, trial, punishment, any manner of exciting ordeal, and commanded his brave heart to bear it. But to be quietly allowed to go his way was intolerable, and, being accused of nothing, he was rushing back to England to insist on being accused of something. A chief of any kind in a small dependency is a person of overwhelming greatness and importance in his own sphere. Every eye there is literally on him. He diffuses even a sort of impression as if he were a good deal too large for his sphere, like the helmet of such portentous size in the court-yard of Otranto. To come down all at once to be an ordinary passenger to England, an ordinary "No. 257, au 3me" at the Hôtel du Louvre in Paris, an obscure personage getting out at the Charing Cross Station and calling a hansom, nobody caring whence he has come or capable, even after elaborate reminder, of calling to memory his story, his grievance, or his identity—that is something to try the soul of a patient man. Mr. Heron was not patient.

He was a young Quixote out of time and place. He never could let anything alone. He could not see a grievance without trying to set it right. The impression that anybody was being wronged or cheated affected and tormented him as keenly as a discordant note or an inharmonious arrangement of colours might disturb persons of loftier artistic soul. In the colonies queer old ideas survive long after they have died out of England, and the traveller from the parent country often comes on some ancient abstraction there as he might upon some old-fashioned garment. Heron started into life with a full faith in the living reality of divers abstractions which we in England have long since dissected, analysed, and thrown away. He believed in and spoke of Progress and Humanity and brotherhood and such like vaguenesses as if they were real things to work for and love. People who regard abstractions as realities are just the very persons to turn solid and commonplace realities into shining and splendid abstractions. Young Heron regarded England not as an island with a bad climate where some millions of florid men made money or worked for it, but as a sort of divine influence inspiring youth to noble deeds and patriotic devotion. He was of course the very man to get into a muddle when he had anything to do with the administration of a new settlement. If the muddle had not lain in his way he would assuredly have found it.

He had so much to do now on his further way home in helping elderly ladies on that side who could not speak French, and on this side who could not speak English: in seeing that persons whom he had never set eyes on before were not neglected at buffets, left behind by trains, or overcharged by waiters: in giving and asking information about everything, that he had not much time to think about the St. Xavier's Settlements and his personal grievance. When the suburbs of London came in sight with their trim rows of stucco-fronted villas and cottages and their front gardens ornamented with the inevitable evergreens, a thrill of enthusiasm came up in Heron's breast, and he became feverish with anxiety to be in the heart of the great capital once again. Now he began to see familiar spires and domes and towers, and then again huge unfamiliar roofs and buildings that were not there when he was in London last, and that puzzled him with their presence. Then the train crossed the river, and he had glimpses of the Thames and Westminster Palace and the Embankment with its bright garden-patches and its little trees, and he wondered at the ungenial creatures who see in London nothing but ugliness. To him everything looked smiling, beautiful, alive with hope and good omen.

Certainly a railway station, an arrival, a hurried transaction, however slight and formal, with a Customs officer, are a damper on enthusiasm of any kind. Heron began to feel dispirited. London looked hard and prosaic. His grievance began to show signs of breaking out again amid the hustling, the crowd, the luggage, and the exertion, as an old wound might under exactly similar circumstances if one in his haste and eagerness were to strain its hardly closed edges.

It was when he was in a hansom driving to his hotel that Heron, putting his hand in his waistcoat pocket, drew out a crumpled card which he had thrust in there hastily and forgotten. The card bore the name of

"Mr. Crowder E. Money,
Victoria Street,
Westminster."

Heron remembered his friend of Paris. "An odd name," he thought; "I have heard it before somewhere. I like him! He seems a manly sort of fellow."

Then he found himself wondering what Mr. Money's daughters were like, and wishing he had observed them more closely in Paris, and asking whether it was possible that girls could be pretty and interesting with such an odd name.

## CHAPTER IV.

### "OH, MUCH-DESIRED PRIZE, SWEET LIBERTY!"

The summer had gone and much even of the autumn, and Miss Grey and her companion were settled in London. Minola had had everything planned out in her mind before they left Dukes-Keeton, and little Miss Blanchet was positively awed by her leader's energy, knowledge, and fearlessness. The first night of their arrival in town they went to a quiet, respectable, old-fashioned hotel, well known of Keeton folk, where Miss Grey's father used to stay during his visits to London for many years, and where his name was still remembered. Then the two strangers from the country set out to look for lodgings, and Miss Grey was able to test her knowledge of London, and satisfy her pride of learning, by conducting her friend straightway to the region in which she had resolved to make a home for herself. She had been greatly divided in mind for a while between Kensington and the West Centre; between the neighbourhood of the South Kensington Museum, the glades of the gardens, and all the charms of the old Court suburb, and the temptations of the National Gallery, the British Museum, and the old-fashioned squares and houses around the latter. She decided for the British Museum quarter. Miss Blanchet would have preferred the brightness and the air of fashion which belonged to Kensington; but Miss Grey ruled that to live somewhere near the British Museum was more like living in London, and she energetically declared that she would rather live in Seven Dials than out of London.

To find a pleasant and suitable lodging would ordinarily have been a difficulty; for the regular London lodging-house-keeper detests the sight of women, and only likes the gentleman who disappears in the morning and returns late at night. But luckily, there are Keeton folk everywhere. As a rule, nobody is born in London, "except children," as a lady once remarked. Come up to London from whatever little Keeton you will, you can find your compatriots settled everywhere in the metropolis. Miss Grey obtained from the kindly landlady of the hotel—who had herself been born in Keeton, and was married to a Glasgow man—a choice of Keeton folk willing to receive respectable and well-recommended lodgers—"real ladies" especially. Miss Grey, being cordially vouched for by the landlady as a real lady, found out a Keeton woman in the West Centre who had a drawing-room and two bedrooms to let.

Had Miss Grey invented the place, it could not have suited her better. It was an old-fashioned street, running out of a handsome old-fashioned square. The street was no thoroughfare. Its other end was closed by a solemn, sombre structure with a portico, and over the portico a plaster bust of Pallas. This was an institution or foundation of some kind which had long outlived the uses whereto it had been devoted by its pious founder. It now had nothing but a library, a lecture-hall, an enclosed garden (into which, happily for her, the windows of Miss Grey's bedroom looked), an old fountain in the garden, considerable funds, a board of trustees, and an annual dinner. This place lent an air of severe dignity to the street, and furthermore kept the street secluded and quiet by blocking up one of its ends and inviting no traffic. The house in which our pair of wanderers was lodging was itself old-fashioned, and in a manner picturesque. It had broad old staircases of stone, and a large hall and fine rooms. It had once been a noble mansion, and the legend was that its owner had entertained Dr. Johnson there, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, and that Mrs. Thrale had often been handed up and down that staircase. Minola loved association with such good company, and it may be confessed went up and down the stairs several times for no other purpose whatever than the pleasure of fancying herself following in the footsteps of bright Mrs. Thrale, with whose wrongs Miss Grey, as a misanthrope, was especially bound to sympathise.

The drawing-room happily looked at least aslant over the grass and the trees of the square. Minola's bedroom, as has been said, looked into the garden of the institution, with its well-kept walks, its shrubs, and its old-fashioned fountain, whose quiet plash was always heard in the seclusion of the back of the house. Had the trunks of the trees been just a little less blackened by smoke, our heroine might well have fancied, as she looked from her bedroom window, that she was in some quaint old abode in a quiet country town. But in truth she did not desire to encourage any such delusion. To feel that she was in the heart of London was her especial delight. This feeling would have brightened and glorified a far less attractive place. She used to sit down alone in her bedroom of nights, in order to think quietly to herself, "Now I am at last really in London; not visiting London, but living in it." There at least was one dream made real. There was one ambition crowned. "Come what will," she said to herself, "I am living in London." In London and freedom she grew more and more healthy and happy. As a wearied Londoner might have sought out, say Keeton, and found new strength and spirits there, so our Keeton girl, who was somewhat pale and thin when she sat on the steps of the ducal mausoleum, grew stronger and brighter every day in the West Central regions of London.

A happier, quieter, freer life could hardly be imagined, at least for her. She spent hours in the National Gallery and the Museum; she walked with Mary Blanchet in Regent's Park, and delighted to find out new vistas and glimpses of beauty among the trees there, and to insist that it was ever so much better than any place in the country. As autumn came on and the trees grew barer, and the skies became of a heavier silver grey, Minola found greater charms in their softened half tones than the brighter lights of summer could give. Even when it rained—and it did rain sometimes—who could fail to see the beauty, all its own, of the green grass, and the darker stems and branches of trees, showing faintly through the veil of the mist and the soft descending shower? It was, indeed, a delightful Arcadian life. Its simplicity can hardly be better illustrated than by the fact, that our adventurous pair of women always dined at one o'clock—when they dined at all—off a chop, except on Sundays, when they invariably had a cold fowl.

Much as Miss Grey loved London, however, it was still a place made up of men whom she considered herself bound to dislike, and of women who depended far too much on these men. Therefore, she made studies of scraps of London life, and amused herself by satirising them to her friend.

"I have accomplished a chapter of London, Mary," she said one evening before their reading had set in; "I have completed my social studies of our neighbours in Gainsborough Place"—a little street of shops near at hand. "I am prepared to give you a complete court guide as to the grades of society there, Mary, so that you may know at once how to demean yourself to each and all."

"Do tell me all about it; I should very much like to know."

"Shall we begin with the highest or the lowest?"

"I think," Miss Blanchet said with a gentle sigh, expressive of no great delight in the story of the lower classes, "I would rather you began low down, dear, and got done with them first."

"Very well; now listen. The lowest of all is the butcher. He is a wealthy man, I am sure, and his daughter, who sits in the little office in the shop, is a good-looking girl, I think. But in private life nobody in Gainsborough Place mixes with them on really cordial terms. Their friends come from other places; from butchers' shops in other streets. They do occasionally interchange a few courtesies with the family of the baker; but the baker's wife, though not nearly so rich, rather patronises and looks down upon Mrs. Butcher."

"Dear me," said the poetess, "what odd people!"

"Well, the pastry-cook's family will have nothing to do, except in the way of business, with the butcher or the baker; but they are very friendly with the grocer, and they have evenings together. Now, the two little old maids, who keep the stationer's shop where the post office is, are very genteel, and have explained to me more than once that they don't feel at home in this quarter, and that their friends are in the West End. But they are not well off, poor things, I fear, and they like to spend an evening now and then with the family of the grocer and the pastry-cook, who are rather proud to receive them, and can give them the best tea and Madeira cake; and both the little ladies assure me that nothing can be more respectable than the families of the pastry-cook and the grocer—for their station of life, they always add."

"Oh, of course!" Miss Blanchet said, who was listening with great interest as to a story, having that order of mind to which anything is welcome that offers itself in narrative form, but not having any perception of a satirical purpose in the whole explanation. Minola appreciated the "of course," and somehow became discouraged.

"Well," she said, "that's nearly all, except for the family of the chemist, who live next to the little ladies of the post office, and who only know even them by sufferance, and would not for all the world have any social intercourse with any of the others. It's delightful, I think, to find that London is not one place at all, but only a cluster of little Keetons. This one street is Keeton to the life, Mary. I want to pursue my studies deeper, though; I want to find out how the gradations of society go between the mothers of the boy who drives the butcher's cart, the baker's boy, and the pastry-cook's boy."

"Oh, Minola dear!"

"You think all this very unpoetic, Mary, and you are shocked at my interest in these prosaic and lowly details. But it is a study of life, my dear poetess, and it amuses and instructs me. Only for chance, you know, I might have been like *that*, and it is a grand thing to learn one's own superiority."

"You never could have been like that, Minola; you belong to a different class."

"Yes, yes, dear, that is quite true, I belong to the higher classes entirely; my father was a country architect, my stepfather is a Nonconformist minister—these are of the aristocracy everywhere."

"You are a lady—a woman of education—Minola," the poetess said, almost severely. She could not understand how even Miss Grey herself could disparage Miss Grey and her parentage in jest.

"I can assure you, dear, that one of the pastry-cook's daughters, whom I talked with to-day, is a much better-educated girl than I am. You should hear her talk French, Mary. She has been taught in Paris, dear, and speaks so well that I found it very hard to understand her. She plays the harp, and knows all about Wagner; I don't. I like her very much, and she is coming here to take tea with us."

The poetess was not delighted with this kind of society, but she never ventured to contradict her leader.

"You can talk to everyone, I do really believe," she said. "I find it so hard to get on with people—with some people."

"I feel so happy and so free here. I can say all the cynical things that please me—*you* don't mind—and I can like and dislike as I choose."

"I am afraid you dislike more than you like, Minola."

"I think I could like anyone who had some strong purpose in life; not the getting of money, or making a way in society. There are such, I suppose; I don't know."

"When you meet my brother, I am sure you will acknowledge that he has a purpose in life which is not the getting of money," said Miss Blanchet. "But you don't like men."

Minola made no reply. Poor little Miss Blanchet felt so kindly to all the race of men, that she did not understand how any woman could really dislike them.

"I am going to do something that will please you to-morrow," Miss Grey said, feeling that she owed her companion some atonement for not warming to the mention of her brother. "I am positively going to hunt out Lucy Money. They must have returned by this time."

This was really very pleasant news for Miss Blanchet. She had been longing for her friend to renew her acquaintance with Miss Lucy Money, about whom she had many dreams. It did not occur to Mary Blanchet to question directly even in her own mind the decrees of Miss Grey, or to say to herself that the course of life which they were leading was not the most delightful that could be devised. But, if the little poetess could have ventured to translate vague yearnings into definite thoughts, she would, perhaps, have acknowledged to herself a faint desire that the brilliant passages of the London career she had marked out for herself in anticipation should come rather more quickly than they just now seemed likely to do. At present there was not much difference perceptible to her between London and Dukes-Keeton. Nobody came to see them—even her brother had not yet presented himself. Her poem did not make much progress; there was no great incentive to poetic work. Minola and she did not know any poets, or artists, or publishers. Mary Blanchet's poetic tastes were of a somewhat old-fashioned school, and did not include any particular care for looking at trees, and fields, and water, and skies, although these objects of natural beauty were made to figure in the poems a good deal in connection with, and illustrative of, the emotions of the poetess. Therefore the rambles in the park were not so delightful to her as to her leader; and when the evening set in, and Minola and she read to each other, Mary Blanchet was always rather pleased if an opportunity occurred for interrupting the reading by a talk. She was particularly anxious that Minola should renew her acquaintance with her old schoolfellow, Miss Lucy Money, whose father she understood to be somehow a great sort of person, and through whom she saw dimly opening up a vista, perhaps the only one for her, into society and literature. But the Money family were out of town when our friends came to London, and Miss Blanchet had to wait; and, even when it was probable that they had returned, Miss Grey did not seem very eager to renew the acquaintance. Indeed her resolve to visit Miss Money now was entirely a good-natured concession to the evident desire of Mary Blanchet. Minola saw her friend's little ways and weaknesses clearly and smiled now and then as she thought of them, and liked her none the less for them—rather, indeed, felt her breast swell with kindliness and pity. It pleased her generous heart to gratify her companion in every way, to find out things that she liked and bring them to her, to study her little innocent vanities that she might gratify them. What little dainties Mary Blanchet liked to have with her tea, what pretty ribbons she thought it became her to wear, these Miss Grey was always perplexing herself about. When she found that she liked to be alone sometimes, that she must have a long walk unaccompanied, that she must have thoughts which Mary would not care to hear, then she felt a pang of remorse, as if she were guilty of a breach of true *camaraderie*, and she could not rest until she had relieved her soul by some special mark of attention to her friend. On the other hand, Mary Blanchet, for all her dreams and aspirations, was a sensible and managing little person, who got for Miss Grey about twice the value that she herself could have obtained out of her money. This was a fact which Minola always took care to impress upon her companion, for she dreaded lest Miss Blanchet should feel herself a dependant. Miss Blanchet, however, in a modest way, knew her value, and had besides one of the temperaments to which dependence on some really loved being comes natural, and is inevitable.

So Minola set out next day, about three o'clock, to look up her schoolfellow, Miss Lucy Money. She went forth on her mission with some unwillingness, and with a feeling as if she were abandoning some purpose, or giving up a little of a principle, in doing so. "I came to London to live alone and independent," she said to herself sometimes, "and already I am going out to seek for acquaintances. Why do I do that? I want strength of purpose. I am just like everybody else," and she began, as was her wont, to scrutinize her own weaknesses, and bear heavily on them. For, absurd as it may seem, this odd young woman really did propose to live alone—herself and Mary Blanchet—in London until they died. Alone, that is, so far as social life and acquaintanceships in society were concerned. Vast and vague schemes for doing good to her neighbours, and for striving in especial to give a helping hand to troubled women, were in Miss Grey's plans of life; but society, so called, was to have no part in them. It did not occur to her that she was far too handsome a girl to be allowed to put herself thus under an extinguisher or behind a screen. When people looked after her as she passed through the streets, she assumed that they noticed some rustic peculiarity in her dress or her hat, and she felt a contempt for them. Her love of London did not imply a love of Londoners, whom in general she thought rude and given to staring. But even if she had thought people were looking at her because of her figure, her face, her eyes, her superb hair, she would have felt a contempt for them all the same. She had a proud indifference to personal beauty, and looked down upon men whose judgment could be affected by the fact that a woman had finer eyes, or brighter hair, or a more shapely mould than other women.

Once Minola was positively on the point of turning back, and renouncing all claim on the acquaintanceship of her former school companion. She suddenly remembered, however, that in condemning her own fancied weakness she had forgotten that her visit was undertaken to oblige Mary Blanchet. "Poor Mary! I have only one little acquaintanceship that has anything to do with society, and am I to deny her that chance if she likes it?" She went on rapidly and resolutely. Sometimes she felt inclined to blame herself for bringing Mary Blanchet away from Keeton, although Mary had for years been complaining of her life and her work there, and beseeching Miss Grey not to leave her behind when she went to live in London.

It was a beautiful autumn day. London looks to great advantage on one of these rare days, and Miss Grey felt her heart swell with mere delight as she looked from the streets to the sky and from the sky to the streets. She passed through one or two squares, and stopped to see the sun, already going down, send its light through the bare branches of the trees. The western sky was covered with grey, silver-edged clouds, which brightened into blots of golden fire as they came closer in the track of the sun. The air was mild, soft, and almost warm. All poets and painters are full of the autumnal charms of the country; but to certain oddly constituted minds some street views in London on a fine autumn day have an unspeakable witchery. Miss Grey walked round and round one of the squares, and had to remind herself of her purpose on Mary Blanchet's behalf in order to impel herself on.

The best of the day had gone, and the early evening was looking somewhat chill and gloomy between the huge ramparts of the Victoria Street houses by the time that Miss Grey stood in that solemn thoroughfare, and her heart sank a little as she reached the house where her old school friend lived.

"Perhaps Lucy Money is altogether changed," Miss Grey said to herself as she came up to the door. "Perhaps she won't care about me; perhaps I shan't like her any more; and perhaps her mamma will think me a dreadful person for not honouring my stepfather and stepmother. Perhaps there are brothers—odious, slangy young men, who think girls fall in love with them. Oh, yes, here is one of them."

For just as she had rung the bell a hansom cab drove up to the door, and a tall, dark-complexioned young man leaped out. He raised his hat with what seemed to Miss Grey something the manner of a foreigner when he saw her standing at the door, and she felt a momentary thrill of relief because, if he was a foreigner, he could not be Lucy Money's brother. Besides, she knew very well that the great houses in Victoria Street were occupied by several tenants, and there was a good hope that the young man might have business with the upper story, and she with the ground floor.

The young man was about to ring the bell, when he stopped, and said—

"Perhaps you have rung already?"

"Yes, I have rung," Miss Grey coldly replied.

"This is Mr. Money's, I suppose?"

"Mr. Money lives here," she answered, with the manner of one resolute to close the conversation. The young man did not seem in the least impressed by her tone.

"Perhaps I have the honour of speaking to Miss Money?" he began, with delighted eagerness.

"No. I am not Miss Money," she answered, still in her clear monotone.

No words could say more distinctly than the young man's expression did, "I am sorry to hear it." Indeed, no young man in the world going to visit Mr. Money could have avoided wishing that the young lady then standing at the door might prove to be Miss Money.

The door opened. and the young man drew politely back to give Miss Grey the first chance. She asked for Miss Lucy Money, and the porter rang a bell for one of Mr. Money's servants. Miss Grey had brought a card with her, on which she had written over her engraved name, "For Lucy Money," and beneath it, "Nola," the short rendering of "Minola" which they used to adopt at school.

Then the porter looked enquiringly at the other visitor.

"If Mr. Money is at home," said the latter, "I should be glad to see him. I find I have forgotten my card-case, but my name is Heron—Mr. Victor Heron; and do, please, try to remember it, and to say it rightly."

## CHAPTER V.

### MISS GREY'S FIRST CALL.

Mr. Money's home, like Mr. Money himself, conveyed to the intelligent observer an idea of quiet, self-satisfied strength. Mr. Money had one of the finest and most expensive suites of rooms to be had in the great Victoria Street buildings, and his rooms were furnished handsomely and richly. He had servants in sober livery, and a carriage for his wife and daughters, and a little brougham for himself. He made no pretence at being fashionable—rather, indeed, seemed to say deliberately, "I am a plain man and don't care twopence about fashion, and I despise making a show of being rich; but I am rich enough for all I want, and whatever money can buy for me I can buy." He would not allow his wife and daughters to aim at being persons of fashion had they been so inclined, but they might spend as much money as ever they pleased. He never made a boast of his original poverty, or the humbleness of his bringing up, nor put on any vulgar show of rugged independence. The impression he made upon everybody was that of a completely self-sufficing—we do not say self-sufficient—man. It was not very clear how he had made his money. He had been at the head of one of the working departments under the Government, had somehow fancied himself ill-treated, resigned his place, and, it was understood, had entered into various contracts to do work for the Governments of foreign States. It was certain that Mr. Money was not a speculator. His name never appeared in the directors' list of any new company. He could not be called a City man. But it was certain that he was rich.

Mr. Money was in Parliament. He was a strong Radical in theory, and was believed to have much stronger opinions than he troubled himself to express. There was a rough, scornful way about him, as of one who considered all our existing arrangements merely provisional, and who in the mean time did not care to occupy himself overmuch with the small differences between this legislative proposition and that. It was not on political subjects that he usually spoke. He was a very good speaker, clear, direct, and expressive in his language, always using plain, effective words, and always showing a perfect ease in the finishing of his sentences There was a savour of literature about him, and it was evident in many indirect ways that he knew Greek and Latin much better than most of the University men. The impression he produced was that of a man who on most subjects knew more than he troubled himself to display. It seemed as if it would take a very ready speaker indeed to enter into personal contest with Mr. Money, and not to get the worst of it.

He was believed to be very shrewd and clever, and was known to be liberal of his money. People consulted him about many things, and to some extent admired him; some were a little afraid of him, and, in homely phrase, fought shy of him. Perhaps he was thought to be unscrupulous; perhaps his blunt way of going at the very heart of a scruple in others made them fancy that he rather despised all moral conventionalities. Whatever the reason was, a certain class of persons always rather distrusted Mr. Money, and held aloof even while asking his advice. No one who had come in his way even for a moment forgot him, or was confused as to his identity, or failed to form some opinion about him, or could have put clearly into words an exact statement of the opinion he had formed.

On this particular day of autumn Mr. Money was in his study reading letters. He was talking to himself in short, blunt sentences over each letter as he read it, and put it into a pigeon-hole, or tore it and threw it into the waste-paper basket. His sentences were generally concise judgments pronounced on each correspondent. "Fool!" "Blockhead!" "Just so; I expected that of you!" "Yes, yes; he's all right." "That will do." Sometimes a comment, begun rather gruffly, ended in a good-natured smile; and sometimes Mr. Money, having read a letter to the close with a pleased and satisfied expression, suddenly became thoughtful, and leaned upon his desk, drumming with the finger-tips of one hand upon his teeth.

A servant interrupted his work by bringing him a message and a name. Mr. Money looked up, said quickly, "Yes, yes; show him in!" and Mr. Victor Heron was introduced.

Mr. Money advanced to meet his visitor with an air of cordial welcome. One peculiarity of Mr. Money's strong, homely face was the singular sweetness of the smile which it sometimes wore. The full lips parted so pleasantly, the white teeth shone, and the eyes, that usually seemed heavy, beamed with so kindly an air, that to youth at least the influence was for the moment irresistible. Victor Heron's emotional face sparkled with responsive expression.

"Well, well! glad to see you, glad to see you. Knew you would come. Shove away those blue-books and sit down. We haven't long got back; but I tried to find you, and couldn't get at your address. They didn't know at the Colonial Institute even. And how are you, and what have you been doing with yourself?"

"Not much good," Heron replied, thinking as usual of his grievance. "I couldn't succeed in seeing anybody."

"Of course not, of course not. I could have told you so. People are not yet coming back to town, except hard-working fellows like me. Have you been cooling your heels in the antechambers of the Colonial Office?"

"Yes, I have been there a little; not much. I saw it was no use just yet, and that isn't a kind of occupation I delight in." The young man's face reddened with the bare memory of his vexation. "I hate that sort of thing."

"To go where you know people don't want to see you? Yes, it tries young and sensitive people a good deal. They've put you off?"

"As I told you, I have seen nobody yet. But I mean to persevere. They shall find I am not a man to be got rid of in that way."

Mr. Money made no observation on this, but went to a drawer in his desk, and took out a little book with pages alphabetically arranged.

"I have been making enquiries about you," he said, "of various people who know all about the colonies. Would you like to hear a summary description of your personal character? Don't be offended—this is a way I have; the moment a person interests me and seems worth thinking about, I enter him in my little book here, and sum up his character from my own observation and from what people tell me. Shall I read it for you? I wouldn't, you may be sure, if I thought you were anything of a fool."

This compliment, of course, conquered Heron, who was otherwise a good deal puzzled. But there was something in Mr. Money's manner with those in whom he took any interest that prevented their feeling hurt by his occasional bluntness.

"I don't know myself," Heron said.

"Of course you don't. What busy man, who has to know other people, could have time to study himself? That work might do for philosophers. I may teach you something now, and save you the trouble."

"I suppose I ought to make my own acquaintance," said Heron resignedly, while much preferring to talk of his grievance.

"Very good. Now listen.

"Heron, Victor.—Formerly in administration of St. Xavier's Settlements. Got into difficulties; dropped down. Education good, but literary rather than business-like. Plenty of pluck, but wants coolness. Egotistic, but unselfish. Good deal of talent and go. Very honest, but impracticable. A good weapon in good hands, but must take care not to be made a plaything."

Heron laughed. "It's a little like the sort of thing phrenologists give people," he said, "but I think it's very flattering. I can assure you, however, no one shall make a plaything of *me*," he added with emphasis.

"So we all think, so we all think," Mr. Money said, putting away his book. "Well, you are going on with this, then?"

"I am going to vindicate my conduct, and compel them to grant me an enquiry, if you mean that." Nothing on earth shall keep me from that."

"So, so! Very well, we'll talk about that another time—many other times; and I may give you some advice, which you needn't take if you don't like, and I shan't be offended. Now, I want to introduce you to my wife and my girls, and you must have a cup of tea. Odd, isn't it, to find men drinking tea at five o'clock in the afternoon? Up at the club, any day about that hour, you might think we were a drawing-room full of old spinsters, to hear the rattling of tea-cups that goes on all around."

He took Heron's arm in a friendly, dictatorial way, and conducted him to the drawing-room on the same floor.

The drawing-room was entered, not by opening a door, but by withdrawing some folds of a great, heavy, dark green curtain. Mr. Money drew aside part of the curtain to make way for his friend; and they both stopped a moment on the threshold. A peculiar, sweet, half-melancholy smile gave a strange dignity for the moment to Mr. Money's somewhat rough face, and he gently let the curtain fall.

"Wasn't there some great person, Mr. Heron—Burke, was it?—who used to say that whatever troubles he had outside, all ceased as he stood at his own door? Well, I always feel like that when I lift this curtain."

It was a pretty sight, as he again raised the curtain, and led Heron in. The drawing-room was very large, and was richly, and as it seemed to Heron somewhat oddly, furnished. The light in the lower part was faint and dim, a sort of yellowish twilight, procured by softened lamps. The upper extremity was steeped in a far brighter light, and displayed to Heron, almost as on a stage, a little group of women, among whom his quick eye at once saw the girl who had come up to the door at the same time with him. She was, indeed, a very conspicuous figure, for she was seated on a sofa, and one girl sat at her feet, while another stood at the arm of the sofa, and bent over her. An elderly lady, with voluminous draperies that floated over the floor, was reclining on a low arm-chair, with her profile turned to Heron. On a fancy table near, a silver tea-tray glittered. A daintily dressed waiting maid was serving tea.

"Take care of the floor as you come along," said Money. "We like to put rugs, and rolls of carpet, and stools now in all sorts of wrong places to trip people up. That shows how artistic we are! Theresa, dear, this is my friend, Mr. Heron."

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Heron," said a full, deep, melancholy voice; and a tall, slender lady partly rose from her chair, then sank again amid her draperies, bowed a head topped by a tiny lace cap, and held out to Heron a thin hand covered with rings, and having such bracelets and dependent chainlets, that, when Heron gave it even the gentlest pressure, they rattled like the manacles of a captive.

"We saw you in Paris, Mr. Heron," the lady graciously said, "but I think you hardly saw us."

"These are my daughters, Mr. Heron, Theresa and Lucy. I think them good girls, though full of nonsense," said Mr. Money.

Lucy, who had been on a footstool at Miss Grey's feet, gathered herself up, blushing. She was a pretty girl, with brown, frizzy hair, and wore a dress which fitted her so closely from neck to hip, that she might really have been, to all seeming, melted or moulded into it. The other young lady, Theresa, slightly and gravely inclined her head to Mr. Heron, who at once thought the whole group most delightful and beautiful, and found his breast filled with a new pride in the loved old England that produced such homes and furnished them with such women.

"Dear, darling papa," exclaimed the enthusiastic little Lucy, swooping at her father, and throwing both arms round his neck, "we have had such a joy to-day, such a surprise! Don't you see anybody here? Oh, come now, do use your eyes."

"I see a young lady whom I have not yet the pleasure of knowing, but whom I hope you will help me to know, Lucelet."

Mr. Money turned to Miss Grey with his genial smile. She rose from the sofa and bowed, and waited. She did not as yet quite understand the Money family, and was not sure whether she ought to like them or not. They impressed her at first as being far too rich for her taste, and odd and affected, and she hated affectation.

"But this is Nola Grey, papa—my dearest old schoolfellow when I was at Keeton; you must have heard me talk of Nola Grey a thousand times."

So she dragged her papa up to Nola Grey, whose colour grew a little at this tempestuous kind of welcome.

"Dare say I did, Lucelet, but Miss Grey, I am sure, will excuse me if I have forgotten; I am very glad to see you, Miss Grey—glad to see any friend of Lucelet's. So you come from Keeton? That's another reason why I should be glad to see you, for I just now want to ask a question or two about Keeton. Sit down."

Miss Grey allowed herself to be led to a sofa a little distance from where she had been sitting. Mr. Money sat beside her.

"Now, Lucelet, I want to ask Miss Grey a sensible question or two, which I don't think you would care twopence about. Just you go and help our two Theresas to talk to Mr. Heron."

"But, papa darling, Miss Grey won't care about what you call sensible subjects any more than I. She won't know anything about them."

"Yes, dear, she will; look at her forehead."

"Oh, I have looked at it! Isn't it beautiful?"

"I didn't mean that," Mr. Money said with a smile; "I meant that it looked sensible and thoughtful. Now go away, Lucelet, like a dear little girl."

Miss Grey sat quietly through all this. She was not in the least offended. Mr. Money seemed to her to be just what a man ought to be—uncouth, rough, and domineering. She was amused meanwhile to observe the kind of devotion and enthusiasm with which Mr. Heron was entering into conversation with Mrs. Money and her elder daughter. That was just what a man ought to be—a young man—silly in his devotion to women, unless perhaps where the devotion was to be accounted for otherwise than by silliness, as in a case like the present, where the unmarried women might be presumed to have large fortunes. So Miss Grey liked the whole scene. It was as good as a play to her, especially as good as a play which confirms all one's own theories of life.

"England, Mr. Heron," said Mrs. Money in her melancholy voice, "is near her fall."

"Oh, Mrs. Money, pray pardon me—England! you amaze me—I *am* surprised—do forgive me—to hear an Englishwoman say so; our England with her glorious destiny!" The young man blushed and grew confused. One might have thought his mother had been called in question, or his sweetheart.

Mrs. Money shook her head and twirled one of her bracelets.

"She is near her fall, Mr. Heron! You cannot know; you have lived far away, and do not see what *we* see. She has proved faithless to her mission."

"Something—yes—there I agree," Mr. Heron eagerly interposed, thinking of the St. Xavier's Settlements.

"She was the cradle of freedom," Mrs. Money went on. "She ought to have been always its nursery and home. What have we now, Mr. Heron? A people absolutely in servitude, the principle of caste everywhere triumphant—corruption in the aristocracy—corruption in the city. No man now dares to serve his country except at the penalty of suffering the blackest ingratitude."

Mr. Heron was startled. He did not know that Mrs. Money was arguing only from the assumption that her husband was a very great man, who would have done wonderful things for England if a perverse and base ruling class had not thwarted him and treated him badly.

"England," Theresa Money said, smiling sweetly, but with a suffusion of melancholy, "can hardly be regenerated until she is once more dipped in the holy well."

"You see, we all think differently, Mr. Heron," said the eager Lucy. "Mamma thinks we want a republic. Tessy is a saint, and would like to see roadside shrines."

"And you?" Heron asked, pleased with the girl's bright eyes and winning ways.

"Oh, I—I only believe in the regeneration of England through the renascence of art. So we all have our different theories, you see, but we all agree to differ, and we don't quarrel much. Papa laughs at us all, when he has time. But just now I am taken up with Nola Grey. If I were a man, I should make an idol of her. That lovely statuesque face, that figure—like the Diana of the Louvre!"

Mr. Heron looked and admired, but one person's raptures about man or woman seldom awaken corresponding raptures in other and impartial breasts. He saw, however, a handsome, lady-like girl, who conveyed to him a sort of chilling impression.

"She was my schoolfellow at Keeton," Lucy went on, "and she was so good and clever that I adored her then, and I do now again. She has come to London to live alone, and I am sure she must have some strange and romantic story."

Meanwhile Mr. Money, who prefaced his enquiries by telling Miss Grey that he was always asking information about something, began to put several questions to her concerning the local magnates, politics, and parties of Keeton. Minola was rather pleased to be talked to by a man as if she were a rational creature. Like most girls brought up in a Nonconformist household in a country town, she had been surrounded by political talk from her infancy, but, unlike most girls, she had sometimes listened to it and learned to know what it was all about. So she gave Mr. Money a good deal of information, which he received with an approbatory "Yes, yes," or an enquiring "So, so," every now and then.

"You know that there's likely to be a vacancy soon in the representation—member of Parliament," he added by way of explanation.

"I know what a vacancy in the representation means," Miss Grey answered demurely, "but I didn't know there was likely to be one just now. I don't keep up much correspondence with Keeton. I don't love it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know."

He smiled.

"You are smiling because you think that a woman's answer? So it is, Mr. Money, and I am afraid it isn't true, but I really didn't think of what I was saying. I *do* know why I don't care much about Keeton."

"Yes, yes; well, I dare say you do. But to return, as the books say—do you know a Mr. Augustus Sheppard?"

She could not help colouring slightly. "Yes, I know him," and a faint smile broke over her face in spite of herself.

"Is he strong in Keeton?"

"Strong?"

"Well liked, respectable, a likely kind of man to get good Conservative support if he stood for Keeton? You don't know, perhaps?"

"Yes, I think I do know. I believe he wishes to get into Parliament, and I am sure he is thought highly of. He is a very good man, a man of very high character," she added emphatically, anxious to repair the mental wrong-doing of thinking him ridiculous and tiresome.

Just at this moment Mr. Heron rose to take his leave, and Mr. Money left the room with him, so that the conversation with Miss Grey was broken off. Then Lucy came to Nola again, and Nola was surrounded by the three women, who began to lay out various schemes for seeing her often and making London pleasant to her. Much as our lonely heroine loved her loneliness, she was greatly touched by their spontaneous kindness, but she was alarmed by it too.

A card was brought to Mrs. Money, who passed it on to Lucy.

"Oh, how delighful!" Lucy exclaimed. "So glad he has come, mamma! Nola, dear, a poet, a real poet!"

But Nola would not prolong her visit that day even for a poet. A very handsome, tall, dark-haired man, who at a distance seemed boyishly young, and when near looked worn and not very young, was shown in. For the moment or two that she could see him, Minola thought she had never seen so self-conceited and affected a creature. She did not hear his name or a word he said, but his splendid dark eyes, deeply set in hollows, took in every outline of her face and form. She thought him the poet of a school-girl's romance made to order.

Minola tore herself from the clinging embraces of Lucy, with less difficulty, perhaps, because of the poet's arrival, to whose society Lucy was clearly anxious to hasten back. It so happened that Mr. Money had kept Mr. Heron for a few minutes in talk, and the result was that exactly as Miss Grey reached the door, Mr. Heron arrived there too. They both came out together, and in a moment they were in the grey atmosphere, dun lines of houses, and twinkling gas-lights of Victoria Street. Minola would much rather have been there alone.

Victor Heron, however, was full of the antique ideas of man's chivalrous duty and woman's sweet dependence, which still lingered in the out-of-the-way colony where he had spent so much of his time. Also, it must be owned that he had not yet quite got rid of the sense of responsibility and universal dictatorship belonging to the chief man in a petty commonwealth. For some time after his return to London he could hardly see an omnibus-horse fall in the street without thinking it was an occasion which called for some intervention on his part. Therefore, when Miss Grey and he stood in the street together, Mr. Heron at once assumed that the young woman must, as a matter of course, require his escort and protection.

He calmly took his place at her side. Miss Grey was a little surprised, but said nothing, and they went on.

"Do you live far from this, Miss Money?" he began.

"I am not Miss Money—my name is Grey."

"Of course, yes—I beg your pardon for the mistake. It was only a mistake of the tongue, for I knew very well that you were not Miss Money."

"Thank you."

"And your first name is so very pretty and peculiar that I could not easily have forgotten it."

"I am greatly obliged to my godfathers and godmothers."

"Did you say that you lived in this quarter, Miss Grey?"

"No—I did not make any answer; I had not time."

"I hope you do not live very near," the gallant Heron observed.

"Why do you hope that?" Miss Grey said, turning her eyes upon him with an air of cold resolution, which would probably have proved very trying to a less sincere maker of compliments, even though a far more dexterous person than Mr. Heron.

"Of course, because I should have the less of your company."

"But there is no need of your coming out of your way for me. I don't require any escort, Mr. Heron."

"I couldn't think of letting a lady walk home by herself. That would seem very strange to me. Perhaps you think me old-fashioned or colonial?"

"I have heard that you are from the colonies. In London people have not time to keep up all these pretty forms and ceremonies. We don't any longer pretend to think that a girl needs to be defended against giants, or robbers, or mad bulls, when crossing two or three streets in open day."

"Well, it is hardly open day now; it is almost quite dark."

"The lamps are lighted," Miss Grey observed.

"Yes, if you call that being lighted! You have such bad gas in London. Why does not somebody stir up people here, and put things to rights? You seem to me the most patient people in all the world. I wish they would give me the ruling of this place for about a twelvemonth."

"I wish they would."

"Do you?" and he looked at her with a glance of genuine gratitude in his dark eyes, for he thought she meant to express her entire confidence in his governing power, and her wish to see him at the head of affairs. Miss Grey, however, only meant that, if he were engaged in directing the municipal government of London, he would probably be rather too busy to walk with her.

"Yes," he went on, "you should soon see a change. For instance,"—they were now at the end of Victoria Street, near the Abbey—"I would begin by having a great broad street, like this, running right up from here to the British Museum—you know where the British Museum is, of course?"

"Yes; I live near it."

"Do you really? I am so glad to hear that. I have been there lately very often. How happy you Londoners are to have such glorious places. In that reading-room I felt inclined to bless England."

Miss Grey was now particularly sorry that she had said anything about her place of residence. Still it did not seem as if much would have been gained by any reticence unless she could actually dismiss her companion peremptorily. Mr. Heron was evidently quite resolved to be her escort all the way along. He was clearly under the impression that he was making himself very agreeable. The good-natured youth believed he was doing quite the right thing, and meant it all for the very best, and therefore could not suppose that any nice girl could fail to accept his attendance in a kindly spirit. That Miss Grey must be a nice girl he was perfectly certain, for he had met her at Mr. Money's, and Money was evidently a fine fellow, a very fine fellow. Miss Grey was very handsome too, but that did not count for very much with Heron. At least, he would have made himself just as readily, under the circumstances, the escort of little Miss Blanchet.

So he talked on about various things—the Moneys, and what charming people they were! the British Museum, what a noble institution! the National Gallery, how hideous the building!—why on earth didn't anybody do something?—the glorious destiny of England—the utter imbecility of the English Government.

It was not always quite easy to keep up with his talk, for the streets were crowded and noisy, and Mr. Heron talked right on through every interruption. When they came to crossings where the perplexed currents and counter-currents of traffic on wheels would have made a nervous person shudder, Mr. Heron coolly took Miss Grey's hand and conducted her in and out, talking all the while as if they were crossing a ball-room floor. Minola made it a point of honour not to hesitate, or start, or show that she had nerves. But when he began to run into politics he always pulled himself up, for he politely remembered that young ladies did not care about politics, and so he tried to find some prettier subject to talk about. Miss Grey understood this perfectly well, and was amused and contemptuous.

"I suppose this man must be a person of some brains and sense," she thought. "He was in command of something somewhere, and I suppose even the Government he calls so imbecile would not have put him there if he were a downright fool. But, because he talks to a woman, he feels bound only to talk of trivial things."

At last the walk came to an end. "Ah, I beg pardon, you live here," Mr. Heron said. "May I have the honour of calling on your family? I sometimes come to the Museum, and, if I might call, I should be delighted to make their acquaintance."

"Thank you," Miss Grey said coldly, "I have no family. My father and mother are dead."

"Oh, I am so sorry! I wish I had not asked such a question." He looked really distressed, and the expression of his eyes had for the first time a pleasing, softening effect upon Miss Grey.

"We lodge here, all alone. A lady—an old friend of mine—and I. We have no acquaintances, unless Lucy Money's family may be called so. We read and study a great deal, and don't go out, and don't see anyone."

"I can quite understand," Mr. Heron answered with grave sympathy. "Of course you don't care to be intruded on by visitors. I thank you for having allowed me the pleasure of accompanying you so far."

He spoke in tones much more deferential than before, for he assumed that the young lady was lonely and poor. There was something in his manner, in his eyes, in his grave, respectful voice, which conveyed to Minola the idea of genuine sympathy, and brought to her, the object of it, a new conviction that she really was isolated and friendless, and the springs of her emotions were touched in a moment, and tears flashed in her eyes. Perhaps Mr. Heron saw them, and felt that he ought not to see them, for he raised his hat and instantly left her.

Minola lingered for a moment on the doorstep, in order that she might recover her expression of cheerfulness before meeting the eyes of Miss Blanchet. But that little lady had seen her coming to the door, and seen and marvelled at her escort, and now ran herself and opened the door to receive her.

"My dear Minola, do tell me who that handsome young man was? What lovely dark eyes he had! Where did you meet him? Is he young Mr. Money?"

The poetess's susceptible bosom still thrilled and throbbed at the sight, or even the thought, of a handsome young man. She could not understand how anybody on earth could avoid liking handsome young men. But in this case a certain doubt and dissatisfaction suddenly dissolved a way into her instinctive gratification at the sight of Minola's escort. A handsome and young Mr. Money might prove an inconvenient visitor just at present.

Minola briefly told her when they were safe in their room. Miss Blanchet was relieved to find that he was not a young Mr. Money, for a young Mr. Money, if there were one, would doubtless be rich.

"Isn't he wonderfully handsome! Such a smile!"

"I hardly know," Minola said, distressedly; "perhaps he is. I really didn't notice. He goes to the Museum, and I must exile myself from the place for evermore, or I shall be always meeting him, and be forced to listen politely to talk about nothing. Mary Blanchet, our days of freedom are gone! We are getting to know people. I foresaw it. What shall we do? We must find some other lodgings ever so far away."

"Do you like Miss Money, dear?" Mary Blanchet asked, timidly.

"Lucy? Oh, yes; very much. But there is Mr. Money, and they are going to be terribly kind to us, and they have all manner of friends; and what is to become of my independence? Mary Blanchet, I will *not* bear it! I *will* be independent!"

"I have news for you, dear," Miss Blanchet said.

"If it please the destinies, not news of any more friends! Why, we shall be like the hare in Gay's fable, if we go on in this way."

"Not of any more friends, darling, but of one friend. My brother has been here."

"Oh!"

"Yes; and he is longing to see you."

Minola sincerely wished that she could say she was longing to see him. But she could not say it, even to please her friend and comrade.

"You don't want to see him," said Mary Blanchet, in piteous reproach.

"But you do, dear," Miss Grey said, "and I shall like to see any one, be sure, who brightens your life."

This was said with full sincerity, although at the very moment the whimsical thought passed through her, "We only want Mr. Augustus Sheppard now to complete our social happiness."

## CHAPTER VI.

### IS THIS ALCESTE?

MINOLA'S mind was a good deal disturbed by the various little events of the day, the incidents and consequences of her first visit in London. She began to see with much perplexity and disappointment that her life of lonely independence was likely to be compromised. She was not sure that she could much like the Moneys, and yet she felt that they were disposed and determined to be very kind to her. There was something ridiculous and painful in the fact that Mr. Augustus Sheppard's name was thrust upon her, almost at the first moment of her crossing for the first time a strange threshold in London; then there was Mary Blanchet's brother turning up; and Mary Blanchet herself was evidently falling off from the high design of lonely independence. Again, there was Mr. Heron, who now knew where she lived, and who often went to the British Museum, and who might cross her path at any hour. Sweet, lonely freedom, happy carelessness of action, farewell!

Mr. Heron was especially a trouble to Minola. The kindly, grave expression on his face when he heard of her living alone declared, as nearly as any words could do, that he considered her an object of pity. Was she an object of pity? Was that the light in which any one could look at her superb project of playing at a lifelong holiday? And if people chose to look at it so, what did that matter to her? Are women, then, the slaves of the opinion of people all around them? "They are," Minola said to herself in scorn and melancholy. "They are; *we* are. I am shaken to my very soul, because a young man, for whose opinion on any other subject I should not care anything, chooses to look at me with pity!"

The night was melancholy. When the outer world was shut out, and the gas was lighted, and the two women sat down to work, and talk, nothing seemed to Minola quite as it had been. The evident happiness and purring high spirits of the little poetess oppressed her. Mary Blanchet was so glad to be making acquaintances, and to have some prospect of seeing the inside of a London home. Then Minola's kindlier nature returned to her, and she thought of Mary's delight at seeing her brother, and how unkind it would be if she, Minola, did not try to enter into her feelings. Her mind went back to her own brother, to their dear early companionship, when nothing seemed more natural and more certain than that they two should walk the world arm-in-arm. Now all that had come to an end—faded away somehow; and he had gone into the world on his own account, and made other ties, and forgotten her. But if he were even now to come back, if she were to hear in the street the sound of the peculiar whistle with which he always announced his coming to her—oh, how, in spite of all his forgetfulness and her anger, she would run to him and throw her arms round his neck! Why should not Mary Blanchet love her brother, and gladden when he came?

"What is your brother like, Mary dear?" she said gently, anxious to propitiate by voluntarily entering on the topic dearest to her friend.

"Oh, very handsome—very, very handsome!"

Miss Grey smiled in spite of herself.

"Now, Minola, I know what you are smiling at; you think it is my sisterly nonsense, and all that, but wait until you see."

"I'll wait," Minola said.

Miss Grey did not go out the next day as usual, although it was one of the soft, amber-grey, autumnal days that she loved, and the Regent's Park would have looked beautiful. She remained nearly all the morning in her own room, and avoided even Mary

Blanchet. Some singular change had taken place within her, for which she could not account, otherwise than by assuming that it was begotten of the fear that she would be drawn, willingly or unwillingly, into uncongenial companionship, and must renounce her liberty. She was forced into a strange, painful, self-questioning mood. Was the whole fabric of her self-appointed happiness and independence only a dream, or worse than a dream, an error? So soon to doubt the value and the virtue of the emancipation she had prayed for and planned for during years! Not often, perhaps, has a warm hearted, fanciful, and spirited girl been pressed down by such peculiar relationships as hers at Keeton lately; a twice-removed stepfather and stepmother, absolutely uncongenial with her, causing her soul and her youth to congeal amid dull repression. What wonder that to her all happiness seemed to consist in mere freedom and unrestricted self-development? And now—so soon—why does she begin to doubt the reality, the fulfilment of her happiness? Only because an impulsive and kindly young man, whom she saw for the first time, looked pityingly at her. This, she said to herself, is what our self-reliance and our emancipation come to after all.

It was a positive relief to her, after a futile hour or so of such questioning, when Mary Blanchet ran upstairs, and with beaming eyes begged that Minola would come and see her brother. "He is longing to see you—and you will like him—oh, you will like him, Minola dearest!" she said beseechingly.

Miss Grey went downstairs straightway, without stopping to give one touch to her hair, or one glance at the glass. The little poetess was waiting a moment, with an involuntary look towards the dressing-table, as if Miss Grey must needs have some business there before she descended, but Miss Grey thought of nothing of the kind, and they went downstairs together.

Minola expected, she could not tell why, to see a small and rather withered man in Mary Blanchet's brother. When they were entering the drawing-room he was looking out of the window, and had his back turned, and she was surprised to see that he was decidedly tall. When he turned round, she saw that not only was he handsome, but that she had recognised the fact of his being handsome before. For he was unmistakably the ideal poet of school-girls whom she had met at Mr. Money's house the day before.

The knowledge produced a sort of embarrassment to begin with. Minola was about to throw her soul into the sacrifice, and greet her friend's brother with the utmost cordiality. But she had pictured to herself a sort of Mary Blanchet in trousers, a gentle old-fashioned, timid person, whom, perhaps, the outer world was apt to misprize, if not even to snub, and whom therefore it became her, Minola Grey, as an enemy and outlaw of the common world, to receive with double consideration. But this brilliant, self-conceited, affected, oppressively handsome young man, on whom she had seen Lucy Money and her mother hanging devotedly, was quite another sort of person. His presence seemed to overcharge the room; the scene became all compound of tall bending form and dark eyes.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Blanchet," Miss Grey began, determined not to be put out by any self-conceited poet and ideal of school-girls. "I must be glad to see you because you are Mary's brother."

"You ought rather to be not glad to see me for that reason," he said, with a deprecating bow and a slight shrug of the shoulders, "for I have been a very neglectful brother to Mary."

"So I have heard," Miss Grey said, "but not from Mary. She always defended you. But I have seen you before, Mr. Blanchet, have I not?"

"At Mrs. Money's, yesterday? Oh, yes; I only saw you, Miss Grey. I went there to see you, and only in the most literal way got what I wanted."

"But, Herbert, you never told me that you were going, or that you knew Mrs. Money," his sister interposed.

"No, dear; that was an innocent deceit on my part. You told me that Miss Grey had gone there, and as I knew the Moneys, I hurried away there without telling you. I wanted to know what you were like, Miss Grey, before seeing my sister again. I hope you are not angry? She is so devoted to you, that she painted you in colours the most bewitching; but I was afraid her friendship was carrying her away, and I wanted to see for myself when she was not present."

Miss Grey remained resolutely silent. She thought this beginning particularly disagreeable, and began to fear that she should never be able to like Mary Blanchet's brother. "Oh, why do women have brothers?" she asked herself. There seemed something dishonest in Mr. Blanchet's proceeding, despite the frank completeness of his confession.

"Well, Herbert, confess that I didn't do her justice—didn't do her common justice," the enthusiastic Mary exclaimed.

"If Miss Grey would not be offended," her brother said, "I would say that I see in her just the woman capable of doing the kind and generous things I have heard of."

"Yes; but we mustn't talk about it," the poetess said, with tears of gratefulness blinking in her eyes, "and we'll not say a word more about it, Minola; not a word, indeed, dear." And she put a deprecating little hand upon Minola's arm.

Then they all sat down, and Herbert Blanchet began to talk. He talked very well, and he seemed to have put away most of the airs of affectation which, even in her very short opportunity of observation, Minola had seen in him when he was talking to the Money girls.

"You have travelled a great deal," Miss Grey said. "I envy you."

"If you call it travelling. I have drifted about the world a good deal, and seen the wrong sides of everything. I make it pay in a sort of way. When any place that I know is brought into public notice by a war or something of the kind, I write about it. Or if a place is not brought into any present notice by anything, I write about it, and take a different view from anybody else. I have done particularly well with Italy, showing that Naples is the ugliest place in all the world; that the Roman women have shockingly bad figures, and that the climate is wretched from the Alps to the Straits of Messina."

"But you don't think that?" Mary Blanchet said, wonderingly.

"Don't I? Well, I don't know. I almost think I do for the moment. One can get into that frame of mind. Besides, I really don't care about scenery. I don't observe it as I pass along. And I like to say what other people don't say, and to see what they don't see. Of course I don't put my name to any of these things; they are only done to make a living. I live *on* such stuff as that. I live *for* Art."

"It is glorious to live for Art," his sister exclaimed, pressing her thin, tiny hands together.

Mr. Blanchet did not seem to care much about his sister's approval.

"My art isn't yours, Mary," he said with a pitying smile. "Pictures of flowers and of little children saying their prayers, and nice poems about good young men and women, are your ideas of painting and poetry, I am sure. You are a lover of the human race, I know."

"I hope I love my neighbours," Mary said earnestly.

"I hope you do, dear. All good little women like you ought to do that. Do *you* love your neighbour, Miss Grey?"

"I don't care much for any one," Miss Grey answered decisively, "except Mary Blanchet. But I have no particular principle or theory about it, only that I don't care for people."

Although Miss Grey had Alceste for her hero, she did not like sham misanthropy, which she now fancied her visitor was trying to display. Perhaps, too, she began to think that this misanthropy rather caricatured her own.

Miss Blanchet, on the contrary, was inclined to argue the question and to pelt her brother with touching commonplaces.

"The more we know people," she emphatically declared, "the more good we see in them. In every heart there is a deep spring of goodness. Oh, yes!"

"There isn't in mine, I know," he said. "I speak for myself."

"For shame, Herbert! How else could you ever feel impelled to try and do some good for your fellow-creatures?"

"But I don't want to do any good to my fellow-creatures. I don't care about my fellow-creatures, and I don't even admit that they are my fellow-creatures, those men and those women too that one sees about. Why should the common possession of two legs make us fellow-creatures with every man, more than with every bird? No, I don't love the human race at all."

"This is his nonsense, Minola; you won't believe a word of it," the little poetess eagerly said, divided between admiration and alarm.

"You good little innocent dear, is it not perfectly true? What did I ever do for you, let me ask? There, Miss Grey, you see as kind an elder sister as ever lived. I remember her a perfect mother to me. I dare say I should have been dead thirty years ago but for her, though whether I ought to thank her for keeping me alive is another thing. Anyhow, what was my way of showing my gratitude? As soon as I could shake myself free, I rambled about the world, a very vagrant, and never took any thought of her. We are all the same, Miss Grey, believe me—we men."

"I can well believe it," Miss Grey said.

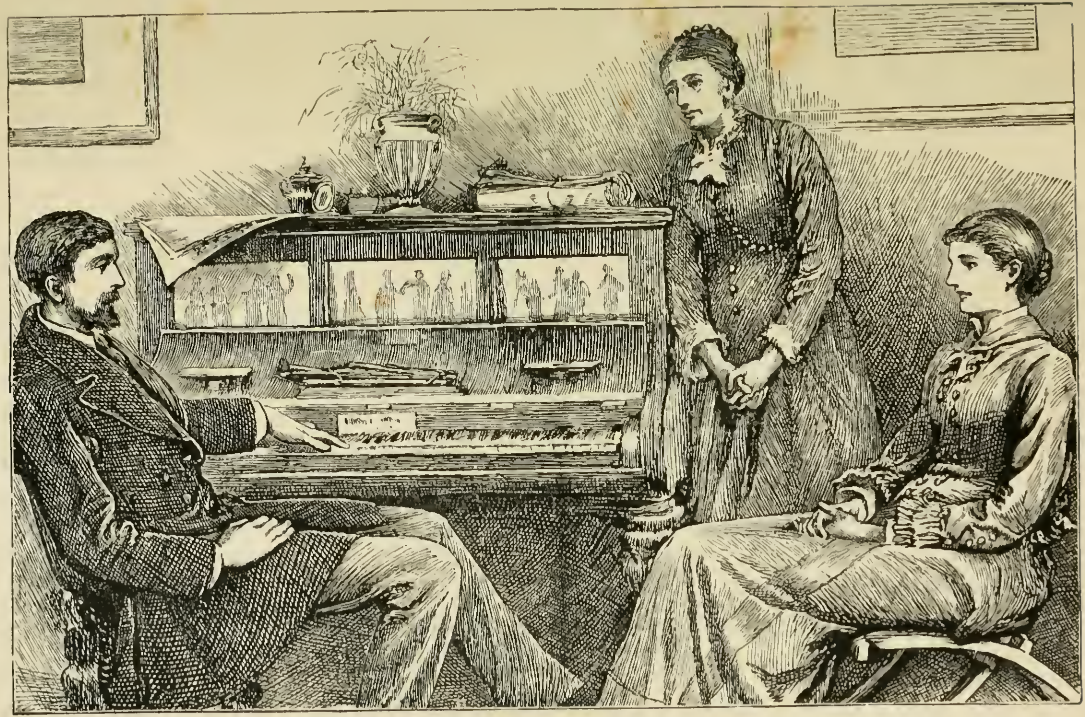
"Of course you can; in all our dealings with you women we are just the same. Our sisters and mothers take trouble without end for us, and cry their eyes out for us, and we—what do we care? I am not worse than my neighbours. If you ask me, Do I admire my fellow-man? I answer frankly, No, not I. What should I admire him for?"

"One must live for something," the little poetess pleaded, much perplexed in her heart as to what Miss Grey's opinion might be about all this.

"Of course. One must live for art; for music and poetry, and colours and decoration."

"And Nature?" Mary Blanchet gently insinuated.

"Nature—no! Nature is the buxom sweetheart of ploughboy poets. We only affect to admire Nature because people think we



*"We don't care about nature—our school."*

can't be good if we don't. No one really cares about great cauliflower suns, and startling contrasts of blazing purple and emerald green. There is nothing really beautiful in Nature, except her decay; her rank weeds, and dank grasses, and funereal evening glooms."

While he talked this way he was seated on the piano stool, with his face turned away from the piano, on whose keys he touched every now and then with a light and seemingly careless hand, bringing out only a faint note that seemed to help the conversation rather than to interrupt it. He was very handsome, Minola could not help thinking, and there was something in his colourless face and deep eyes that seemed congenial with the talk of glooms and decay. Still, true to her first feeling towards all men, Minola was disposed to dislike him, the more especially as he spoke with an air of easy superiority, as one who would imply that he knew how to maintain his place above woman in creation.

"I thought all you poets affected to be in love with Nature," she said; "I mean, you younger poets," and she emphasised the word "younger" with a certain contemptuous tone, which made it just what she meant it to be—"smaller poets."

"Why, younger poets?"

"Well, because the elder ones, I think, really were in love with Nature, and didn't affect anything."

He smiled pityingly.

"No," he said decisively, "we don't care about Nature—our school."

"I am from the country: I don't think I know what your school is."

"We don't want to be known in the country; we couldn't endure to be known in the country."

"But Fame?" Minola asked; "does Fame not go outside the twelve-mile radius?"

"Oh, Miss Grey, do pray excuse me, but you really *don't* understand us; we don't want fame. What is fame? Vulgarity made immortal."

"Then, what do you publish for?"

He rose from his seat, and seized his hair with both hands, then constrained himself to endurance, and sat down again.

"My dear young lady, we don't publish, we don't intend to publish. No man in his senses would publish for us if we were never so well inclined. No one could sell six copies. The great, thick-headed public couldn't understand us. We are satisfied that the true artist never does have a public, or look for it. The public can have their Tennysons, and Brownings, and Swinburnes, and Tuppers, and all that lot"——

"That lot!" broke in Miss Blanchet, mildly horrified, "that lot! Browning and Tupper put together!"

"My dear Mary, I don't know one of these people from another; I never read any of them now. They are all the same sort of thing to me. These persons are not artists; they are only men trying to amuse the public. Some of them, I am told, are positively fond of politics."

"Don't your school care for politics?" Miss Grey asked, now growing rather amused.

"Oh, no, we never trouble ourselves about such things. What can it matter whether the Reform Bill is carried—is there a Reform Bill going on now?—I believe there always is—or what becomes of the Eastern question, or whether New Zealand has a constitution? These are questions for vestrymen, not artists; we don't love man."

"There I am with you," Miss Grey said; "if that alone were qualification enough, I should be glad to be one of your fraternity, for I don't love man; I think he is a poor creature at his best."

"So do I," said the poet, turning towards her with eyes in which for the moment a deep and genuine feeling seemed to light up; "the poorest creature, at his best? Why should anyone turn aside for a moment from his path to help such a thing? What does it matter, the welfare of him and his pitiful race? Let us sing, and play, and paint, and forget him and the destiny that he makes such a work about. Wisdom only consists in shutting our ears to his cries of ambition, and jealousy, and pain, and being happy in our own way, and forgetting him."

Their eyes met for a moment, and then Minola lowered hers. In that instant a gleam of sympathy had passed from her eyes into his, and he knew it. She felt a little humiliated somehow, like a proud fencer suddenly disarmed at the first touch of his adversary. For as he was speaking scorn of the human race, she was saying to herself, "This man, I do believe, has suffered deeply. He has found people cold, and mean, and selfish—as *I* have—and he feels it, and cannot hide it. I did him wrong; he is not a fribble or sham cynic, only a disappointed dreamer." The sympathy which she felt, showed itself only too quickly in her very eloquent eyes.

Herbert Blanchet rose after an instant of silence and took his leave, asking permission to call again, which Miss Grey would have gladly refused if she could have stood up against the appealing looks of Mary. So she had to grant him the permission, thinking as she gave it that another path of her liberty was closed.

Mary went to the door with her brother, and, much to Minola's gratification, remained a long time talking with him there.

Miss Grey went to the piano and began to sing—softly to herself, that she might not be heard outside. The short autumnal day was already closing in London. Out in the country there would be two hours yet of light before the round, red sun went down behind the sloping fields, with the fresh upturned earth, and the clumps of trees, but here, in West Central regions of London, the autumn day dies in its youth. The dusk already gathered around the singer, who sang to please or to soothe herself. In any troubled mood Miss Grey had long been accustomed to clear her spirits by singing to herself; and on many a long, dull Sunday at home—in the place that was called her home—she had committed the fraud of singing her favourite ballads to slow, slow time, that they might be mistaken for hymns and pass unreproved. Her voice and way of singing made the song seem like a sweet, plaintive recitative; just the singing to hear in the "gloaming," to draw a few people hushed around it, and hold them in suspense, fearful to lose a single note and miss the charm of expression. In truth, the charm of it sprang from the fact that the singer sang to express her own emotions, and thus every tone had its reality and its meaning. When women sing for a listening company, they sing conventionally, and in the way that some teacher has taught, or in what they believe to be the manner of some great artist; or they sing to somebody or at somebody, and in any case they are away from that truthfulness which in art is simply the faithful expression of real emotion. With Minola Grey singing was an end rather than a means; a relief in itself, a new mood in itself; a passing away from poor and personal emotions into ideal regions, where melancholy, if it must be, was always divine, and pain, if it would intrude, was purifying and ennobling. So, while the little poetess talked with her brother in the dusk, at the doorway, with the gas-lamps just beginning to light the monotonous street, Minola was singing herself into the pure blue ether, above the fogs, and clouds, and discordant selfish voices.

She came back to earth with something like a heavy fall, as Mary Blanchet ran in upon her in the dark and exclaimed—

"Now, do tell me—how do you like my brother?"

To say the truth, Miss Grey did not well know. "I wonder is he an Alceste?" she asked herself. On the whole, his coming had made an uncomfortable, anxious, uncanny impression upon her, and she looked back with a kind of hopeless regret on the days when she had London all to herself, and knew nobody.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ON THE BRIDGE.

THERE was one walk of which Minola Grey was especially fond, and which she loved to enjoy alone. It led by a particular track through Regent's Park, avoiding for the most part the frequented paths, and bringing her at one time to the summit of a little mound or knoll, from which she could look across broad fields, where sheep were grazing, and through clumps of trees and over hedges, and from which, by a happy peculiarity, all sight of the beaten and dusty avenues of the park were shut out. The view from this little eminence was perhaps most beautiful on a moist and misty day. There the soft, loving, artistic breath of the rain-charged clouds breathed tenderly on the landscape, and effaced any of the harsher, or meaner, or in any way more prosaic details. There the gazer only saw a noble expanse of deliciously green grass and darker hedge-rows, and trees of dun and grey, and softly-mottled moss-grown trunks, and here and there a bed of flowers, and all under a silver-grey atmosphere that almost seemed to dissolve while the eye rested on it. When Minola had looked long enough on the scene opening below the mound, she then usually pursued her course by devious ways until she reached one of the bridges of the canal, and there she made another halting-place. The scene from the canal-bridge, unlike that from the mound, looked best on a bright, breezy day, of quick changing lights and shadows. Then the brown water of the canal sparkled and gladdened in the sun, and Minola, leaning over the little bridge, and fixing her eyes on the water as it rippled past the nearer bank, might enjoy, for the hour, the full sensation of one who floats in a boat along a stream, and watches the trees and the grasses of the shore. The place was quiet enough, and rich enough in trees and shrubs and little reeds quivering out of the water, to seem, at least in Minola's pleased eyes, like a spot on the bank of the canal far in the country, while yet there was to her the peculiar and keen delight of knowing herself in London. Sometimes, too, a canal-boat came gliding along, steered by a stalwart and sunburnt woman in a great straw bonnet, and the boat and the woman brought wild and delicious ideas of far-off country places, with woods and gipsies, and fresh, half savage, half poetic life. Minola extracted beautiful pictures and much poetry and romance from that little bridge over the discoloured canal, creeping through the heart of London.

The population of London—even its idlers—usually move along in tracks and grooves. Where some go, others go; where few go, at last none go. It is wonderful what hours of almost absolute solitude Minola was able to enjoy in the midst of Regent's Park. Voices, indeed, constantly reached her: the cries and laughter of children, the shoutings of cricketers, the dulled clamour of the metropolis itself. These reached her as did the bleating of sheep and the tinkle of their bells, the barking of dogs, and occasionally the fierce, hoarse, thrilling growl or roar of some disturbed or impatient animal in the Zoological Gardens near at hand. But many and many a time Minola lounged for half an hour on her little knoll or on her chosen bridge, without seeing more of man or woman than of the lions in their cages on the other side of the enclosure. There was a particular hour of the day, too, when the park in general was especially deserted, and it appears almost needless to say that this was the time selected usually by Miss Grey for her rambles. It was sometimes a curious, half sensuous pleasure for her thus alone amid the murmur of the trees, to fancy herself, for the moment, back again within sight of the mausoleum at Keeton, where she had spent so many weary and solitary hours, and then awaking, to rejoice anew in her freedom and in London.

It was a fortunate and kindly destiny which assigned to our heroine a poetess for a companion. Much as she loved occasional solitude, Minola loved still better the spirit of fidelity to the obligations of true *camaraderie*: and if Miss Blanchet had had any manner of work to do, from the mending of a stocking to the teaching of a school, in which Minola could possibly have assisted her, Minola would never have thought of leaving her to do the work alone. Or even if Miss Blanchet had work to do in which Minola could not have helped her, but to which her presence would be any manner of encouragement, Minola would have stayed with her, and never dreamed of play while her companion had to be at work. But we may safely appeal to all the poets of all time to say whether anybody ever desired companionship while engaged in the composition of poetry. Sappho herself could have well dispensed with the society of Phaon at such a moment. It is true that Corinne threw off some of her grandest effusions in full face of an admiring crowd, and recited them not only with Lord Nelvil but at him. Corinne, however, was of the improvisatrice class, to which Mary Blanchet did not profess to belong, and we own, moreover, to a constant suspicion that Corinne must have sat up late for many previous nights getting her improvisations by heart. At all events Miss Blanchet was not Corinne, and required seclusion, and much thought, and comparison of rhymes, and even looking out in dictionaries, in order to the composition of her poems. At the present time Minola was well aware that her friend had a new collection of poems on hand, and that the poems would be churned off with less difficulty if the author were occasionally left to herself for an hour or two. Therefore Minola was free to go into Regent's Park, with untroubled conscience and light heart. The woman who was not a poet revelled in the rustling branches and the sight of the soft grass, and was filled with glad visions and dreams by the flowing even of a poor, clouded, slow canal-stream, and was rapt into the ideal at the sight of a reed growing in the water and shaken by the wind. The poetess remained at home in a dull room, and hammered out rhymes with the help of a dictionary.

But, to do Minola justice, she was not wholly given up, even in these free and lonely hours, to the sweet, innocent sensuousness that fills certain beings when amid trees and the sounds of flowing water. She had many scruples about the possible selfishness of her life, and wondered whether it was not wrong thus to live, and whether it was not through some fault of hers that no opportunity presented itself to her of doing any good for man or woman. She asked herself sometimes whether she had not been impatient and wilful in her dealings with the people at home—she still, when in a self-questioning and penitential mood, thought and spoke of Keeton as "home"—and whether she had not done wrong in leaving the material enclosure of any place bearing even by tradition the name of home, for a life of freedom which some censors might have thought unwomanly. There are metaphysicians who hold that, although man of his nature has no intuitive knowledge, yet that the accumulative experience of generations supplies gradually for men as they are born a something which is like intuition to start with, and which they could not now start clear of. So the experiences or the traditions of generations form a sort of factitious and accumulated conscience for women independent of any abstract or eternal laws, and amounting in strength to something like intuition. Over this shadow they cannot leap. Minola, filled as she was with a peculiarly independent spirit, and driven by circumstances to consider its indulgence a right and even a duty, could not keep from the occasional torment of a doubt whether there must not be something wrong in the conduct of any woman who, under any circumstances, leaves voluntarily, and while she is yet under age, the home of her childhood, and takes up her abode among strangers, without guardians, mistress of herself, and in lodgings.

Perhaps some such ideas were in Minola's mind when she left

Mary Blanchet, a few mornings after the meetings described in the last chapter, and set out for a pleasant lonely walk in Regent's Park. Perhaps it was the very pleasure of the walk, and the loneliness, now missed for some days, that made her dread being selfish, and sent her downward into a drooping and penitent reaction. "This will never do," she kept thinking; "I ought to try to do something for somebody. I am growing to think only of myself—and I broke away from Keeton because I was getting morbid in thinking about myself."

It was in this remorseful condition of mind that she approached her favourite mound, longing for an hour of quiet delight there, and half ashamed of her longing. When she had nearly reached its height, she discerned that the fates had seemingly resolved to punish her for her love of solitariness, by decreeing that her chosen retreat should that day be occupied. There was a seat on which she usually sat, and now a man was there. That was bad enough, but she could in an ordinary case have passed on, and sought some other place. Now, however, she saw that that was denied to her; for the intruder was Mr. Victor Heron, and at the sound of her footstep he looked round, recognised her, and was already coming towards her, with hat uplifted, and courteous bow.

The very rapid moment of time between Minola's first seeing Mr. Heron, and his recognising her, had enabled her quick eyes to perceive that when he thought himself alone he was anything but the genial and joyous personage he appeared in company. At first Miss Grey's attention was withdrawn from her own disappointment by the air of melancholy, and even of utter despondency, about the face and figure of the seated man. He sat leaning forward, his chin supported by one hand, his eyes fixed moodily on the ground; he seemed to have no manner of concern with sky or scene, and his dark-complexioned face gave the impression of one terribly at odds with fortune. Minola felt almost irresistibly drawn towards one who seemed unhappy. Her harmless misanthropy went out at a breath in the presence of any man who appeared to suffer.

But the change which came over Mr. Heron when he saw her can only be likened to that which would be made by the sudden illumination of a house that a second before was all dark, and seemingly tenantless. He came to meet her with sparkling eyes and delighted expression. Mr. Heron, it should perhaps be explained, considered himself so much older than Miss Grey, so entirely an experienced, mature, not to say outworn man, that he did not think of waiting to see whether Miss Grey was inclined to encourage a renewal of the acquaintance. He considered it his duty to be polite and friendly to the pretty girl he had met at Money's, and whom he assumed to be poor, and wanting in friends.

"How fortunate I am to meet you here to-day!" he said. "You remember me, I hope, Miss Grey?—I haven't called you Miss Money this time. Come, now—don't say you have forgotten me."

"I could not say I had forgotten you, for it would not be true, Mr. Heron."

"Thank you; that was very prettily said, and kindly."

"Was it? I really didn't mean it to be either pretty or kind—only the truth."

"I see, you go in for being downright, and saying only what you mean. I am very glad. So do I, and I am very much delighted to meet you here, Miss Grey. Come, you won't say as much for me?"

"I cannot say that I was glad to see anybody just here; this place is almost always deserted, except by me."

"You come here often, and you are sorry to have your retreat broken in upon? Don't hesitate to say so, Miss Grey, and I will promise not to come into this part of the Park—or into any part of the Park for that matter—any more. Why should I disturb you?"

He spoke with such earnestness and such evident sincerity that Minola began to feel ashamed of her previous ungraciousness.

"That would be rather hard upon you, and a little arrogant on my part," she said, smiling. "The Park isn't mine; and, if it were, I am sure I could not be selfish enough to wish to shut you out from any part of it. But I am in the habit of being a good deal alone; and I fear it makes me a little rude and selfish sometimes. I was thinking of that just as I came up here and saw you."

"Then you saw me before I saw you?"

"Oh, yes."

"I am afraid you must have seen a very woe-begone personage."

"Yes; you seemed unhappy, I thought."

"There is something sympathetic about you, Miss Grey, for all your coldness and loneliness."

"Surely," said Miss Grey, "a woman without some feeling of sympathy would be hardly fit to live."

"You think so?" he asked, quite earnestly and gravely; "so do I—so do I indeed. Men have little time to sympathise with men—they are all too busy with their own affairs. What should we do but for the sympathy of women? Now tell me, why do you smile at that? I saw that you were trying not to laugh."

"I could not help smiling a little, it was so thoroughly masculine a sentiment."

"Was it? How is that, now?" His direct way of propounding his questions rather amused and did not displease her. It was like the way of a rational man talking with another rational being —a style of conversation which has much attraction for some women.

"Well, because it treated women so honestly as creatures only formed to make men comfortable, by coming up and sympathising with them when they are in a humour for sympathy, and then retiring out of the way into their corner again."

"I can assure you, Miss Grey, that never has been my idea. Nothing of the kind, indeed. To tell the truth, I have not known much about the sympathy of women and all that. I have lived awfully out of the world, and I never had any sisters, and I hardly remember my mother. I know women chiefly in poems and romances, and I believe I generally adopt the goddess theory. In honest truth, most women do seem to me a sort of goddesses."

"You will not be long in England without unlearning that theory," Miss Grey said. "Our writers seem to have hardly any subject now but the faults and follies of women. One might sometimes think that woman was a newly-discovered creature that the world could never be done with wondering at."

"Yes, yes; I read a good deal of that sort of thing out in the colonies. But I have retained the goddess theory so far, at least. Mrs. Money seems to me a sort of divinity. Miss Money is a born saint; she ought to go about with a gilt plate round her head. Miss Lucy Money seems like a little angel of light. Are you smiling again? I do assure you these are my real feelings."

"I was not smiling at the idea, but only at the difference between it and the favourite ideas of most people at present, even of women about women."

"May I walk a little with you," Mr. Heron said, "or will you sit and rest here, if you are tired, and we will talk? Don't stand on formality and send me away, although I will go if you like, and not feel in the least offended. But if we might talk for a while, it would give me great pleasure. You said just now that you did not wish to be selfish. It will be very unselfish and very kind if you will let me talk to you a little. I felt very wretched when you came up, quite in a suicidal frame of mind."

"Oh, no! Pray don't speak in that way. You do not mean it, I am sure."

"In one sense I do mean it—that is, it is quite true that I should not have thrown myself into the water or blown my brains out; that sort of thing seems to me like abandoning one's post without orders from head-quarters. But I felt in that condition of mind when one can quite understand how such things are done, and would be glad if he were free to follow the example. For *me* that is a great change in itself," the young man added with some bitterness.

"What can I do for him?" Miss Grey asked herself mentally. "Nothing but to show him the view from the canal bridge. There is nothing else in my power.—There is a very pretty view a short distance from this," she said; "a view from a bridge, and I am particularly fond of looking from bridges. Should you like to walk there?"

"I should like to walk anywhere with you," Victor Heron said, with a look of genuine gratefulness, which had not the faintest breath of compliment in it, and could only be accepted as frank truth.

Perhaps, if Miss Grey had been a town-bred girl, she might have hesitated about setting out for a companionable walk in the Park with a young man who was almost a stranger to her. But, as it was, she appeared to herself to have all the right of free action belonging to one in a place of which the public opinion can in no wise touch her. She acted in London as freely as one speaks with a friend in a foreign hotel room, where he knows that the company around are unable to understand what he is saying. In this particular instance, however, Minola hardly thought about the matter at all. There was something in Heron's open and emotional way which made people almost at the first meeting cease to regard him as a stranger. Perhaps, if Minola had thought over the matter, she might have cited in vindication of her course the valuable authority of Major Pendennis, who, when asked whether Laura might properly take walks in the Temple Gardens with Warrington, eagerly said, "Yes, yes, begad, of course, you go out with him. It's like the country, you know; everybody goes out with everybody in the Gardens; and there are beadles, you know, and that sort of thing. Everybody walks in the Temple Gardens." Regent's Park, one would think, ought to come under the same laws. There are beadles there, too, or guardian functionaries of some sort although it may be owned that in their walk to and from the canal bridge Heron and Minola encountered none of them.

It is doubtful whether Heron, at least, would have noticed such a personage even had he come in their way, for the young man talked nearly all the time, except when he paused for an answer to some direct question, and he seldom took his eyes from Minola's face. He was not staring at her, or broadly admiring her; nor, indeed, was there anything in his manner to make it certain that he was admiring her at all, as man conventionally is understood to admire woman. But he had evidently put Miss Grey into the place of a sympathetic and trusted friend, and he talked to her accordingly. She was amused and interested, and she now and then kept making little disparaging criticisms to herself, in order to sustain her place as the cool depreciator of man. But she was very happy for all that.

One characteristic peculiarity of this sudden and singular acquaintanceship ought to be mentioned. When people still read "Gil Blas" they would have remembered at once how the waiting-woman received delightfully the advances of Gil Blas, believing him to be a gentleman of fortune, and how Gil Blas paid great court to the waiting-woman, believing her to be a lady of rank. The pair of friends in Regent's Park were drawn together by exactly opposite impulses: each believed the other poor and unfriended. Minola was under the impression that she was giving her sympathy to a ruined and unhappy young man, who had failed in life almost at the very beginning, and was now friendless in stony-hearted London. Victor Heron was convinced that his companion was a poor orphan girl, who had been sent down by misfortune from a position of comfort, or even wealth, to earn her bread by some sort of intellectual labour, while she lived in a small back room in a depressed and mournful quarter of London.

He told her the story of his grievance; it may be that he even told her some parts of it more than once. It was a strange sensation to her, as she walked on the soft green turf, in the silver-grey atmosphere, to hear this young man, who seemed to have lived so bold and strange a life, appealing to her for an opinion as to the course he ought to pursue to have his cause set right. The St. Xavier's Settlements do not geographically count for much, and politically they count for still less. But when Mr. Heron told of his having been administrator and commandant there; of his having made treaties with neighbouring kings (she knew they were only black kings); of his having tried to put down slavery, and to maintain what he persisted in believing to be the true honour of England; of war made on him, and war made by him in return—while she listened to all this, it is no wonder if our romantic girl from Dukes-Keeton sometimes thought she was conversing with one of the heroes and master-spirits of the time. He made the whole story very clear to her, and she thoroughly understood it, although her imagination and her senses were sometimes disturbed by the tropic glare which seemed to come over the places and events he described. At last they actually came to be standing on the canal bridge, and neither looked at the view they had come to see.

"Now, what do you advise?" Heron said, after having several times impressed some particular point on her. "I attach great importance to a woman's advice. You have instincts, and all that, which we haven't; at least so everybody says. Would you let this thing drop altogether, and try some other career, or would you fight it out?"

"I would fight it out," Minola said, looking up to him with sparkling eyes, "and I would never let it drop. I would make them do me justice."

"Just what I think; just what I came to England resolved to do. I hate the idea of giving in; but people here discourage me. Money discourages me. He says the Government will never do anything unless I make myself troublesome."

"Well, then, why not make yourself troublesome?"

"I have made myself troublesome in one sense," he said, with a vexed kind of laugh, "by haunting ante-chambers, and trying to force people to see me who don't want to see me. But I can't do any more of that kind of work; I am sick of it. I am ashamed of having tried it at all."

"Yes, I couldn't do that," Minola said gravely.

"Then," Heron said, with a little embarrassment, "a man—a very kind and well-meaning fellow, an old friend of my father's—offered to introduce me to Lady Chertsey—a very clever woman, a queen of society, I am told, who gets all the world—of politics, I mean—into her drawing-room, and delights in being a sort of power, and all that. She could push a fellow, they say, wonderfully if she took any interest in him. But I couldn't do that, you know."

"No?—why not?"

"Well, I shouldn't care to be introduced to a lady's drawing-room with the secret purpose of trying to get her to do me a service. There seems something mean in that. Besides, I have a cause—at least, I think I have—which is too good to be served in that kind of way. If I can't get a hearing and justice from the Government of England and the people of England for the sake of right and for the claims I have, I will never try to get it through—oh, well, perhaps I ought not to say what I was going to say."

"Why not?" Minola asked again.

"I mean, perhaps I ought not to say it to you."

"I don't know, really. Tell me what it is, and then I'll tell you whether you ought to say it."

He laughed. "Well, I was only going to say that I don't care to have my cause served by petticoat influence."

"I think you are quite right. If I were a man I should think petticoat influence in such a matter contemptible. But why should you not like to say so?"

"Only because I was afraid you might think I meant to speak contemptuously of the influence and the advice of women. I don't mean anything of the kind. I have the highest opinion of the advice of women and their influence, as I have told you already; but I couldn't endure the idea of having a lady, who doesn't know or care anything about me and my claims, asked by somebody to say a word to some great man or some great man's wife, in order that I might get a hearing. I am sure you understand what I mean, Miss Grey."

"Oh, yes, I never should have misunderstood it; and I know that you are quite right. It would be a downright degradation."

"So I felt. Anyhow, I could not do it. Then there remains the making myself troublesome, as Money advises"——

"Yes, what is that?"

"Getting my case brought on again and again in the House of Commons, and having debates about it, and making the whole thing public, and so forcing the Government either to do me justice or to satisfy the country that justice has already been done," he said bitterly.

"That would seem to me a right thing to do," Miss Grey said; "but I know so little, that I ought not to offer a word of advice."

"Oh, yes, I should trust to your feelings and instincts in such a case. Well, I don't like, somehow, being in the hands of politicians and party men, who might use me and my cause only as a means of annoying the Government—not really from any sense of right and justice. I don't know if I make myself quite understood; it is hard to expect a lady, especially a young lady, to understand these things."

"I think I can quite understand all that. We are not so stupid as you seem to suppose, Mr. Heron."

"Stupid! Didn't I tell you of my goddess theory?"

"Some of the goddesses were very stupid, I always think. Venus was stupid."

"Well, well; anyhow you are not Venus."

"No, indeed."

"In that sense, I mean. Then I do succeed in making myself understood?"

"Oh, yes!" She could see that he was looking disappointed at her interruption and her seeming levity, which was indeed only the result of a momentary impulse to keep up to herself her character as a scorner of men. "I think I understand quite clearly that you fear to be made the mere instrument of politicians; and I think you are quite right. I did not think of that at first, but, now that you explain it, I am sure that you are right."

He nodded approvingly. "Then comes the question," he said, "what is to be done?"

Leaning against the bridge, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and stood looking into her face, as if he were really waiting for her to solve the problem for him.

"That is entirely beyond me," she said. "I know nothing; I could not even guess at what ought to be done."

"No? Now, here is my idea. Why not plead my cause myself?"

"Plead the cause yourself! Can that be done?"

"Yes; myself—in Parliament."

Minola's mind at once formed and framed a picture of a stately assembly, like a Roman Senate, or like the group of King Agrippa, Festus, Bernice and the rest, and Mr. Heron pleading his cause like Cicero or Paul. The thing seemed hardly congruous. It did not seem to her to fall in with modern conditions at all. Her face became blank; she did not well know what to answer.

"Are people allowed to do such things now, in England?" she asked,—"to plead causes before Parliament?"

An odd idea came up in her mind, that perhaps by the time this strange performance came to be enacted, Mr. Augustus Sheppard might be in Parliament, and Mr. Heron's enthusiastic eloquence would have to be addressed to him. She did not like the idea.

"You don't understand," Heron said. "You really don't, this time. What I mean is to get into Parliament—be elected for some place, and then stand up and make my own fight for myself."

She kindled at the idea.

"Oh, yes, of course! How stupid I am not to see at once! That is a splendid idea; the very thing I should like to do if I were a man and in your place."

"You really think so?"

"Indeed, I do. But, then"—and she hesitated, for she feared that she had been only encouraging him to a wild dream—"does it not cost a great deal of money to get into Parliament?"

"No; I think not; not always, at least. I should look out for an opportunity. I have money enough—for me. I'm not a rich man, Miss Grey, but my father left me well enough off, as far as that goes ; and you know that in a place like St. Xavier's one couldn't spend any money. There was no way of getting rid of it. No, my troubles are none of them money troubles. I only want to vindicate my past career, and so to have a career for the future. I ought to be doing something. I feel in an unhealthy state of mind while all this is pressing on me. You understand?"

"I can understand it," Miss Grey said, turning to leave the bridge, and bestowing one glance at the yellow, slow-moving water, and the reeds and the bushes of which she and her companion had not spoken a word. "It is not good to have to think of oneself. But you are bound to vindicate yourself; that I am sure is your duty. Then you can think of other things — of the public and the country."

"He is rich," she thought, "and he is clever and earnest, in spite of his egotism. Of course he will have a career, and be successful. I thought that he was poor and broken-down, and that I was doing him a kindness by showing sympathy with him."

They went away together, and Heron, delighted with her encouragement and her intelligence, unfolded splendid plans of what he was to do. But Minola somehow entered less cordially into them than she had done before, and Mr. Heron at last became ashamed of talking so much about himself.

"I hope we shall meet again," he said, as she stopped significantly at one of the gates leading out of the Park, to intimate that now their roads were separating. "I wish you would allow me to call and see you. I do hope you won't think me odd, or that I am presuming on your kindness. I am a semi-barbarian, you know—have been so long out of civilisation—and I haven't any idea of the ways of the polite world."

"Nor I," said Minola; "I have come from utter barbarism—from a country town."

"But I do hope we shall meet again, for you are so sympathetic and kind."

She bade him good-day, and nodded with a friendly smile, but made no answer to the repeated expression of his hope, and she hastened away.

Heron could not endure walking alone just then. He hailed a hansom and disappeared.

"How vain men are!" Minola thought as she went her way. "How egotistic they all are!" Of course she assumed herself to have obtained a complete knowledge of all the characters of men. "How egotistic he is! Of course he tells his whole story to every woman he meets. Lucy Money no doubt has it by heart."

She did not remember for the moment that her own favourite hero, Alceste, was likewise somewhat egotistic and effusive, and that he was very apt to pour out the story of his wrongs into the ear of any sympathetic woman. But she was disappointed with herself and her friend just now, and was not in a mood to make perfectly reasonable comparisons.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A "HELPER OF UNHAPPY MEN."

Mrs. Money had one great object in life. At least, if it was not an object defined and set out before her, it was an instinct : it was to make people happy. She could not rest without trying to make people happy. The motherly instinct, which in other women is satisfied by rushing at babies wherever they are to be seen, and ministering to them, and fondling them, and talking pigeon-English to them, exuberated in her so far as to set her trying to do the mother's part for all men and women that came within her range, even when their years far exceeded hers. There was one great advantage to herself personally in this : it kept her content in what had come to be her own sphere. One cannot go meddling in the affairs of duchesses and countesses and Ministers of State, with whatever kindly desire of setting everything to rights and making them all happy. People of that class give themselves such haughty airs that they would rather remain unhappy in their own way than obtain felicity at the hand of some person of inferior station. So Mrs. Money believed ; and perhaps one secret cause of her dislike to the aristocracy (along with the avowed conviction that the aristocratic system had somehow misprised and interfered with her husband) was the feeling that if she were among them they would not allow her to do anything for them. She therefore maintained a circle of which she was herself the queen and patroness and Lady Bountiful. She busied herself about everybody's affairs, and was kind to everybody, without any feeling of delight in the mere work of patronising, but out of a sheer pleasure in trying to make people happy. Naturally she made mistakes, and the general system of her social circle worked so as to occasion a continual change, a passing away of old friends and coming in of new. As young men rose in the world and became independent, as girls got married and came to consider themselves supreme in their own sphere, they tended to move away from Mrs. Money's influence. Even the grateful and the generous could not always avoid this. For beginners in any path of life she was the specially-appointed helper and friend; and next to these she might be called the patron saint of failures. In her circle were young poets, painters, lawyers, novelists, preachers, ambitious men looking out for seats in Parliament, or beginners in Parliament; also there were the grey old poets whom no one read; the painters who could not get their pictures exhibited or bought; the men who were in Parliament ten or twenty years ago, and got out and never could get in again; and the inventors who could not impress any government or capitalist with a sense of the value of their discoveries. No front-rank, successful person of any kind was usually to be found in Mrs. Money's rooms. Her guests were the youths who were putting their armour on for the battle, and the worn-out campaigners who had put it off, defeated.

Naturally, when Minola Grey came in Mrs. Money's way, the sympathy and interest of the kindly lady were quickened to their keenest. This beautiful, motherless, fatherless, proud, lonely girl—not so old as her own Theresa, not older than her own Lucy—living by herself, or almost by herself, in gloomy lodgings in the heart of London—how could she fail to be an object of Mrs. Money's deep concern? Of course Mrs. Money must look into all her affairs, and find out whether she was poor; and in what sort of way she was living; and whether the people with whom she lodged were kind to her.

Mary Blanchet's pride of heart can hardly be described when an open carriage, with a pair of splendid greys, stopped at the door of the house in the no-thoroughfare street, and a footman got down and knocked; and it finally appeared that Mrs. Money, Miss Money, and Miss Lucy Money had called to see Miss Grey. Miss Grey, as it happened, was not at home, although the servant at first supposed that she was; and thus the three ladies were shown into Minola's sitting-room, and there almost instantly captured by Miss Blanchet. We say "almost" because there was an interval long enough for Lucy to dart about the room from point to point, taking up a book here, a piece of music there, an engraving, a photograph, or a flower, and pronouncing everything delightful. The room was old-fashioned, spacious, and solid, very unlike the tiny apartments of the ordinary West-end lodging; and, what with the flowers and the books, it really looked rather an attractive place to enthusiastic eyes. Miss Money kept her eyes on the ground for the most part, and professed to take little notice of the ordinary adornments of rooms; for Miss Money was a saint, and was furthermore engaged to a man not far from her father's years, who, having made a great deal of money at the parliamentary bar, was now thinking of entering the Church, and had already set about the building of a temple of mediæval style, in the progress of which Miss Money naturally was deeply interested.

Miss Blanchet was in a flutter of excitement as she entered the sitting-room. As she was crossing its threshold she was considering whether she ought to present a copy of her poems to each of the three ladies or only to Mrs. Money, and whether she ought to tender the gift now or send it on by the post. The solemn eyes and imposing presence of Mrs. Money were almost alarming, and the trailing dresses and feathers of all the ladies sent a thrill of admiration and homage into the heart of the poetess—everything was so evidently put on regardless of expense. Little Mary had always been so poor and so stinted in the matter of wardrobe that she could not help admiring these splendidly-dressed women. Mary, however, luckily remembered what was due to the dignity of poetic genius, and did not allow her homage to show itself too much in the form of trepidation. She instantly put on her best company manners, and spoke in the sweetly-measured and genteel tone which she used to employ at Keeton, when she had occasion to interchange a word with the judges. or the sheriffs, or some eminent counsel.

"Minola will be home in a few moments—a very few," Miss Blanchet said. "Indeed, I expect her every minute. I know she would be greatly disappointed if she did not see you."

"Oh, I am not going without seeing Nola!" said Lucy.

"I am Minola's friend," Mary explained with placid dignity. "I may introduce myself. My brother, I know, has already the honour of your acquaintance. I am Miss Blanchet."

"Mr. Herbert Blanchet's sister?" Mrs. Money said, in melancholy tone, but with delighted eyes; "this is indeed an unexpected and a very great pleasure."

"Why, you don't mean to say you are Herbert Blanchet's sister?" Lucy exclaimed, seizing both the hands of the poetess. "He's the most delightful creature, and a true poet, oh, yes, a man of genius!"

The eyes of Mary moistened with happiness and pride.

"Herbert Blanchet is my brother. He is much younger than I; I need hardly say that. I used to take care of him years ago, almost as if I were his mother. We were a long time separated; he has been so much abroad."

The faithful Mary would not for all the world have suggested or admitted that their long separation was due to any indifference on the part of her brother. Indeed, at the moment she was not thinking of anything of the kind, only of his genius, and his beauty, and his noble heart.

"He never told me he had a sister," Mrs. Money said, "or I should have been delighted to call on you long ago, Miss Blanchet. It is your brother's fault, not mine. I shall tell him so."

"He did not know that I was coming to London," Mary was quick to explain; "he thought I was still living in Keeton. I only came to London with Minola."

"Oh! You lived in Keeton, then, always, along with Miss Grey?"

"How delightful!" Lucy exclaimed, desisting from her occupation of opening books and turning over music; "for you can tell us all about Nola, and her love story."

"Her love story?" Mrs. Money repeated, in tones of melancholy enquiry.

"Her love story!" Miss Blanchet murmured tremulously, and wondering who had betrayed Minola's secret.

"Oh, yes," said Lucy decisively. "I know there's some love story—something romantic and delightful. Do tell us, Miss Blanchet."

Even the saint-like Theresa now showed a mild and becoming interest.

"It's not exactly a love story," Miss Blanchet said, with some hesitation, not well knowing what she ought to reveal and what to keep back. "At least, it's no love affair on Minola's part. She never was in love—never. She detests all love-making—at least, she thinks so," the poetess said, with a gentle sigh. "But there was a gentleman, who was very much in love with her."

"Oh, she must have had heaps of lovers!" interposed Lucy.

Miss Blanchet then told the story of Mr. Augustus Sheppard, and how he was rich and handsome—at least, rather handsome, she said—and how he wanted to marry Minola; and her people very much wished that she would have him, and she would not; and how at last she hastened her flight to London to get rid of him. All this was full of delightful interest to Lucy, and still further quickened the kindly sympathy of Mrs. Money. Then Mary Blanchet went into a long story about the death of Minola's mother and the second marriage of Minola's father, and then the father's death and the stepmother's second marriage, and the discomfort of the home which fate had thus provided for Minola.

She expatiated upon the happiness of the sheltered life Minola had had while her mother was living, and the change that came upon her afterwards, until the only doubt Mrs. Money had ever entertained about Minola—a doubt as to the perfect propriety and judgment of her coming to live almost alone in London—vanished altogether, and she regarded our heroine as a girl who had been driven from her home, instead of having fled from it.

Mrs. Money delicately and cautiously approached the subject of Minola's means of subsistence. On this point no one could enlighten her better than Miss Blanchet, who knew to the sixpence the income and expenditure of her friend. Well, Minola was not badly off for a girl, Mrs. Money thought. A girl could live nicely and quietly, like a lady, but very quietly, on that. Besides, some rich man would be sure to fall in love with her.

"But she ought to have a great deal of money," the poetess eagerly explained, very proud of her leader's losses. "Her father was a rich man, quite a rich man, and he had quarrelled with her brother, and she ought to have all the money, only for that second marriage." Indeed, Miss Blanchet added the expression of her own profound conviction that there must have been some queer work — some concealment or something — about Mr. Grey's property, seeing that so little of it came to Minola.

"I'll get Mr. Money to look into all that," Mrs. Money said decisively. "He understands all about these things, and nothing could be hidden from him."

Miss Blanchet modestly intimated that she had confided her suspicions to her brother, and begged him to try and find out something.

"Oh, he never could understand anything about it!" Lucy said. "Poets never know about these things. It's just in papa's line. He'll find out. They can't baffle him. I know they have been cheating Nola—I know they have! I know there's a will hidden away somewhere, making her the rightful heir or whatever it is."

"About this gentleman—this lover. Is he a nice person?" Mrs. Money began.

"Mr. Augustus Sheppard?" Mary asked, mentioning his name for the first time in the conversation.

"Augustus Sheppard! Is that his name?" Lucy demanded eagerly. "Why, then, papa knows him! Indeed he does. I do declare papa knows everything!"

"Why do you think, dear, that he knows this gentleman?"

"Because I heard him asking Nola about Mr. Augustus Sheppard the other day, mamma, in our drawing-room."

"He couldn't have known this, I think," Miss Blanchet said.

"Oh, no, I suppose not; but he knows him, and he'll tell us all about him. Why wouldn't Nola have him, Miss Blanchet?"

"He is rather a formal sort of person, and heavy, and not the least in the world poetic or romantic; and Minola does not like him at all. She doesn't think his feelings are very deep; but there I am sure she is wrong," the poetess added emphatically. "She has never had occasion to make a study of human feelings as others have."

"You think he has deep feelings?" Mrs. Money asked, turning the full light of her melancholy eyes upon Mary, and with her whole soul already in the question.

"Oh, yes; I know he has. I know that he will persevere, and will try to make Minola marry him still. He is a man I should be afraid of, if he were disappointed. I should indeed."

"Mamma, don't you think we had better have Nola to stay with us for a while?" Lucy asked. "Miss Blanchet could describe him, or get a photograph, and we could give orders that no such man was ever to be admitted, if he should call and ask to see her. Some one should always go out with her, or she should only go in the carriage. I dread this man; I do indeed. Miss Blanchet is quite right, and she knows more than she says, I dare say. Such terrible things have happened, you know. I read in the paper the other day of a young man who fell in love with a girl—in the country it was, I think, or in Spain perhaps, or somewhere—and she would not marry him; and he hid himself with a long dagger, and when she was going to church he stabbed her several times."

"I don't think Mr. Augustus Sheppard would be likely to do anything of that kind," Miss Blanchet said. "He's a very respectable man, and a steady, grave sort of person."

"You never can tell," Lucy declared. "When those quiet men are in love and disappointed, they are dreadful! I've read a great many things just like that in books."

"Well, dear," Mrs. Money said, "we'll ask your papa. If he knows this gentleman—this person—he can tell us what sort of man he is. It doesn't seem that he is in London now."

"He may have come to-day," said Lucy.

Miss Theresa looked at her watch.

"Mamma dear, I don't think Miss Grey is coming in just yet, and it's growing late, and I have to attend the Ladies' Committee of the Saint Angulphus Association, at four."

"You go, mamma, with Theresa," Lucy exclaimed. "I'll wait; I must see Nola. I begin to be alarmed. It's very odd her staying out. I think something must really have happened. That man may have been in town, waiting somewhere. You go; when I have seen Nola, and am satisfied that she is safe, I can get home in the omnibus, or the underground, or the steamboat, or somehow. I'll find my way, you may be sure."

"My dear," her mother said, "you were never in an omnibus in your life."

"Papa goes in omnibusses, and he says he doesn't care whether other people do or not."

"But a lady, my dear"——

"Oh, I've seen them in the streets full of women! They don't object to ladies at all."

"But my dear young lady," Miss Blanchet pleaded, "there is not the slightest occasion for your staying. Mr. Sheppard isn't at all that kind of person. Minola is quite safe. She is often out much later than this, although I confess that I did expect her home much earlier to-day."

"I'll stay till Nola comes," the positive little Lucy declared, "unless Miss Blanchet turns me out; and there's an end of that. So, mamma dear, you and Tessy do as you please, and never mind me."

"When Minola does come"—— Mary Blanchet began to say.

"When she does come?" Lucy interrupted in portentous accents. "Say if she does come, Miss Blanchet."

"When she does come, please don't say anything of Mr. Sheppard. Of course she would not like to think that we spoke about such a subject."

"Oh, of course, of course!" all the ladies chorused, with looks expressive of immense caution and discretion; and in true feminine fashion all honestly assuming that there could be nothing wrong in talking over anybody's supposed secrets so long as the person concerned did not know of the talk.

"I see Miss Grey," said the quiet Theresa suddenly. She had been looking out of the window to see if the carriage was near. As a professed saint she had naturally less interest in ordinary human creatures than her mother and sister had.

"Thank Heaven!" Lucy exclaimed.

"Dear Lucy!" Theresa interposed in tones of mild remonstrance, as if she would suggest that not everybody had a right to make reference to Heaven, and that Heaven would probably resent any allusion to it by the unqualified.

"Well, I am thankful that she is coming all the same; but I wish you wouldn't call her Miss Grey, Tessy. It seems cold and unfriendly. Call her Nola, please."

Mary Blanchet went to the door, and exchanged a brief word or two with Minola, in order that she might be prepared for her visitors. Minola came in, looking very handsome, with her colour heightened by a quick walk home, and the little excitement of her morning.

"How lovely you are looking, Nola dear!" Lucy exclaimed, after the first greetings were over. "You look as if you had been having an adventure."

"I have had a sort of adventure," Minola answered with a faint blush.

The one thought went through the minds of all her listeners, at the same moment, and it shaped itself into a name—"Mr. Augustus Sheppard." All were silent and breathless.

"It was not much," Minola hastened to say. "Only, I met Mr. Victor Heron in Regent's Park, and I have been walking with him."

Most of her listeners seemed relieved.

"I wish I had met him," Lucy blurted out; "he is very handsome, and I should like to have walked with him. Oh, what nonsense I am talking!" and she grew red, and jumped up and looked out of the window.

Then they all talked about something else; and the visit closed with a promise that Minola and Mary Blanchet would present themselves at one of Mrs. Money's little weekly receptions out of season, which was to take place the following evening; and after which Mrs. Money hoped to decoy them into staying for the night. Mary Blanchet went to bed that night in an ecstasy of happiness, only disturbed now and then by a torturing doubt as to whether Mrs. Money would be equally willing to receive her if she had known that she had been the keeper of the court-house at Keeton; and whether she ought not to forewarn Mrs. Money of the fact; and whether she ought not, at least, to call Minola's attention to the question, and submit it to her judgment.

## CHAPTER IX.

### IN SOCIETY.

Mr. Money was not a very regular visitor at his wife's little receptions out of the season. In the season and when they had larger and more formal gatherings, he showed himself as much as was fitting and regular; for many of the guests then were virtually his guests, persons who desired especially to see him, and of whose topics he could talk. A good many foreign visitors were there usually—scientific men, and railway contractors, and engineers, and shipbuilders, from Germany, Italy, and Russia, and of course the United States, who looked upon Mr. Money as a person of great importance and distinction, and would not have cared anything about most of Mrs. Money's guests.

The foreigners were curiously right and wrong. Mr. Money was a person of importance and distinction. Every Londoner who knew anything knew his name, and knew that he was clever and distinguished. If a Russian stranger of rank were dining with a Cabinet minister, and were to express a wish to see and know Mr. Money, the minister would think the wish quite natural, and would take his friend down to the lobby of the House of Commons, and make him acquainted with Mr. Money. We have all been foreigners, ourselves, somewhere, and we know how our longing to see some celebrity, as we suppose, of the land we are visiting, some one whose name was familiar to us in England, has been occasionally checked and chilled by our finding that in the celebrity's own city no one seems to have heard of him. There are only too many celebrities of this kind which shine, like the moon, for those who are a long way off. But Mr. Money was a man of mark in London, as well as in St. Petersburgh and New York. Therein the foreigners found themselves right. Yet Mr. Money's position was somewhat peculiar for all that, in a manner no stranger could well appreciate. The Cabinet minister did not ask Mr. Money to meet his friend at dinner; or, at all events, would never have been able to say to his friend, "Money? Oh, yes! Of course you ought to know him. He is coming to-morrow to dine with us—won't you come and meet him?" The most the Cabinet minister would do would be to get up a little dinner-party, suitably adjusted for the express purpose of bringing his friend and Mr. Money together. It would be too much to say that Mr. Money was under a cloud. There rather seemed to be a sort of faint idea abroad that he ought to be, or some day would be, under a cloud, and no one knew why.

No such considerations as these, however, would have affected the company who gathered round Mrs. Money in the out-of-season evenings, or could have been appreciated by them. They were, for the most part, entirely out of Mr. Money's line. He came among them irregularly and at intervals; and if he found there any man or woman he knew or was taken with, he talked to him or her a good deal, and perhaps, it it were a man, he carried him and one or two others off to his own study or smoking-room, where they discoursed at their ease. Sometimes Lucelet was sent to her papa, if he was not making his appearance in the drawing-room, to beg him to accomplish some such act of timely intervention. Somebody, perhaps, presented himself among Mrs. Money's guests who was rather too solid, or grave, or scientific, or political, to care for the general company, and to be of any social benefit to them; or some one, as we have said, in whose eyes Mr. Money would be a celebrity, and Mrs. Money's guests counted for nothing. Then Lucy went for her father, if he was in the house, and drew him forth. He was wonderfully genial with his womankind. They might disturb him at any moment and in any way they chose. He seemed to have as little idea of grumbling if they disturbed him as a Newfoundland dog would have of snapping at his master's children if they insisted on rousing him up from his doze in the sun.

Mr. Money talked very frankly of his daughters and their prospects sometimes.

"My girls are going to marry any one they like," he would often say; "the poorer the better, so far as I am concerned, so long as they like the girls and the girls like them." As chance would have it, a rich man fell in love with Theresa, and she in her quiet, sanctimonious way loved him, and that was settled.

"Now, Lucelet, look out for yourself," Mr. Money would say to his blushing daughter. "If you fall in love with some fine young fellow, I don't care if he hasn't sixpence. Only be sure, Mrs. Lucelet, that you are in love with him, and that he is in love with you, and not with your expectations."

Lucelet generally smiled and saucily tossed her head, as one who should say that she considered herself a person quite qualified to make an impression without the help of any expectations.

"I sometimes wish the right man would come along, Lucelet," Mr. Money said one day, throwing his arm round his pretty daughter's shoulder, and drawing her to him.

"Papa! do you want to get rid of me so soon? I wonder at you. I know I don't want to get rid of you."

"No, no, dear; it isn't that. Never mind; where's your mamma? Just run and ask her"—— and Mr. Money started something else, and put an end to the conversation.

Mr. Money's idea with regard to the future of his daughters did not fail to become known among his acquaintances in general, and would doubtless have drawn young men in goodly numbers around his home, even if Lucelet were far less pretty than she really was. But, in any case, Mrs. Money loved to be friendly to young people, and her less formal parties were largely attended, almost always, by the young. Miss Theresa's future husband did not come there often. He had known the family chiefly through Mr. Money and Parliament; and, coming once to dine with Mr. Money, he fell fairly in love with the dove-like eyes and saintly ways of Theresa. Theresa was therefore what her father would have called "out of the swim." She looked tolerantly upon her mother's little gatherings of poets *en herbe*, artists who were great to their friends, patriots hunting for constituencies, orators who had not yet caught the Speaker's eye, and persons who had tried success in all these various paths and failed. She looked on them tolerantly, but her soul was not in them; it floated above them in a purer atmosphere. It was now, indeed, floating among the spires of the church which her lover was to build.

One peculiarity seemed common to the guests whom Mrs. Money gathered around her. On any subject in which they felt the slightest interest they never felt the slightest doubt. The air they breathed was that of conviction; the language they talked was that of dogma. The men and women they knew were the greatest, most gifted, and most beautiful in the world; the men and women they did not know were nothing—were beneath contempt. Every one had what Lowell calls an "I-turn-the-crank-of-the-universe air." In that charmed circle every one was either a genius destined yet to move the world, or a genius too great for the dull, unworthy world to comprehend. It was a happy circle, where success or failure came to just the same.

All in a flutter of delight was Mary Blanchet when preparing to enter that magical circle. She was going at last to meet great men and brilliant women. Perhaps, some day, she might even come to be known among them—to shine among them. She could never be done embracing Minola for having brought her to the gate of that heaven. She spent all the day dressing herself and adjusting her hair; but as the hours went on she became almost wretched from nervousness. When it was nearly time for them to go she was quivering with agitation. They went in a brougham hired specially for the occasion, because, although Mrs. Money offered to send her carriage, and Mary would have liked it much, Minola would hear of nothing of the kind. Mary was engaged all the way in the brougham in the proper adjustment of her gloves. At last they came to the place. Minola did the gentleman's part, and handed her agitated companion out. Mary Blanchet saw a strip of carpet on the pavement, an open door with servants in livery standing about, blazing lights, brightly-dressed women going in, a glimpse of a room with a crowd of people, and then Minola and she found themselves somehow in a ladies' dressing-room.

"Minola, darling, don't go in without me; I am quite nervous—I should never venture to go in alone."

Minola did not intend to desert her palpitating little companion, who now indeed clung to her skirts and would not let her go had she been inclined. Miss Blanchet might have been a young beauty just about to make her *début* at a ball, so anxious was she about her appearance, about her dress, about her complexion; and at the same time she was so nervous that she could hardly compel her trembling fingers to give the finishing touches which she believed herself to need. Minola looked on wondering, puzzled, and half angry. The poetess was unmistakably a little, withered, yellowing old maid. She had not even the remains of good looks. No dressing or decoration possible to woman could make her anything but what she was, or deceive any one about her, or induce any one to feel interested in her. The handsome, stately girl who stood smiling near her was about to enter the drawing-room quite unconcerned as to her own appearance, and indeed not thinking about it; and the homely little old maid was quite distressed lest the company generally should not sufficiently admire her, or should find any fault with her dress.

"Come along, you silly poetess," said Minola at last, breaking into a laugh, and fairly drawing her companion away from the looking-glass; "What do you think anybody will care about you or me? We'll steal in unnoticed, and we shall be all right."

"It's the first time I ever was in London society, Minola dear, and I'm quite nervous."

"It's the first time I ever was in London society, and I'm not a bit nervous. No one knows us, dear—and no one cares. So come along."

She fairly carried Mary Blanchet out of the dressing-room, along a corridor lined with seats, on which people who had been in the drawing-room and had come out, were chattering, and flirting, and lounging—and at last over the threshold of the drawing-room, and into the presence of the hostess. A few friendly words were got through, and Minola dragged her companion along through the crowd into the recess formed by the window, where there were some unoccupied seats.

"Now, Mary, that's done. The plunge is made, dear! We are in Society! Let us sit down here—and look at it."

"This," said Mary faintly—"this, at last, is Society."

"I suppose it is, dear. At least it will do very well for you and me; we should never know any difference. Imagine all these people marquises and countesses, and what more can we want to make us happy? They may be marquises and countesses, for all I know."

"I should think there must be some great poets, and authors, and artists, Minola. I am sure there must be. Oh, there is my brother!"

In effect Mr. Herbert Blanchet had already fixed his keen dark eyes on Minola, and was making his way up to her retreat, rather to Minola's distress. He addressed Minola at once with that undefinable manner of easy and kindly superiority which he always adopted towards women, and which, it must be owned, impressed some women a great deal. To his sister he held out, while hardly looking at her, an encouraging hand of recognition.

"Have you seen Delavar's picture?" he asked Minola.

"No; who is Delavar?"

"Delavar? He *was* the greatest painter of our time—at least, of his school, for I don't admit that his school is the true one."

"Oh, is his picture here?"

"In the other room—yes. He painted it for Mr. Money—for Mrs. Money rather I should say, and it has just been sent home. Come with me, and I will show it to you."

"And Mary?"

"We'll come back for Mary presently. The rooms are too full. We couldn't all get through. If you'll take my arm, Miss Grey!"

Minola rose and took his arm, and they made their way slowly through the room. They moved even more slowly than was necessary, for Herbert Blanchet was particularly anxious to show off his companion and himself to the fullest advantage. The moment Minola entered the room he saw that she was the handsomest girl there, and that her dressing was simple, graceful, and picturesque. He knew that before a quarter of an hour had passed everybody would be asking who she was, and he resolved to secure for himself the effect of being the first to parade her through the rooms. He was a singularly handsome man—as has been said before, almost oppressively handsome; and a certain wasted look about his eyes and cheeks added a peculiar and striking effect to his appearance. He was dark, she was fair; he was a tall man, she was a rather tall girl; and if his face had a worn look, hers had an expression of something like habitual melancholy, which was not perhaps in keeping with her natural temperament, and which lent by force of contrast an additional charm to her eyes when they suddenly lit up at the opening of any manner of animated conversation. No combination could be more effective, Mr. Blanchet felt, than that of his appearance and hers ; and then she was a new figure. So he passed slowly on with her, and he knew that most people looked at them as they passed. He took good care, too, that they should be engaged in earnest talk.

"I am delighted to have you all to myself for a moment, Miss Grey—to tell you that I know all about your goodness to Mary. That is why I would not bring her with us now. No—you must let me speak—I am not offering you my thanks. I know you would not care about that. But I must tell you that I know what you have done. I have no doubt that you are her sole support—poor Mary!"

"I am her friend, Mr. Blanchet—only that."

"Her only friend too. Her brother has not done much for her! To tell you the truth, Miss Grey, it isn't in his power now. You don't know the struggles of us, the unsuccessful men in literature, who yet have faith in ourselves. I am very poor. My utmost effort goes in keeping a decent dress-coat and buying a pair of gloves ; I don't complain—I am not one bit deterred, and I only trouble you with this confession, because, whatever I may have been in the past, I had rather you knew me to be what I am—a wretched, penniless struggler—than believe that I left my sister to be a burden on your friendship."

"Mary is the only friend I have," said Minola. "It is not wonderful if I wish to keep her with me. And you will make a great success some time."

He shook his head.

"If one hadn't to grind at things for bare living one might do something. I am not bad enough, or good enough : and that's the truth of it. I dare say if I were mean enough to hunt after some woman with money I might have succeeded as well as others --but I couldn't do that."

"No, I am sure you could not."

"I am not mean enough for that. But I am not high-minded enough to accept my path, and be content with it and proud of it. Now I shan't bore you any more about myself. I wanted you to know this that you might not think too harshly of me. I know you felt some objection to me at first ; you need not try politely to deny it."

"Oh, no ; I don't want to deny it. I prefer truth to politeness a great deal. I did think you had neglected your sister ; but really I was not surprised. I believe other men do the same thing."

"But now you see that I have some excuse?"

"I am glad to hear it, Mr. Blanchet."

"Glad to hear that I am so wretchedly poor, Miss Grey?" he said, with a smile, and bending his eyes on her. "Glad to hear that your friend's brother is such a failure?"

"I would rather a thousand times hear that you were poor than that you were heartless. I don't call it a failure to be poor. I should call it a failure to be selfish and mean."

She spoke in a low tone, but very earnestly and eagerly; and she suddenly thought she was speaking too eagerly, and stopped.

"Well," he said, after a moment's pause, "here is the picture. We shall get to it presently, when these people move away."

They had entered, through a curtained door, a small room, which was nearly filled with people standing before a picture, and admiringly criticising it. Minola, with all her real or fancied delight in noting the jealousies and weaknesses of men and women, could hear no words of detraction or even dispraise.

"Is the painter here?" she asked of her companion in a whisper.

"No; I haven't seen him. Perhaps he'll come in later on."

"Would you think it cheap cynicism if I were to ask why they all praise the picture?—why they don't find any fault with it."

"Oh, because they are all of the school, and they must support their creed. Our art is a creed to us. I don't admit that I am of Delavar's school any more; in fact. I look upon him as a heretic. He is going in for mere popularity; success has spoilt him. But to most of these people here he is still a divinity. They haven't found him out yet."

"Oh!"

This little exclamation broke from Minola as some people at length struggled their way outward, and allowed her to see the whole of the picture.

"What is it called?" she asked.

"Love stronger than Death."

The scene was a graveyard, under a sickly yellow moon rising in a livid and greenish sky. A little to the left of the spectator was seen a freshly opened grave. In the foreground were two figures—one that of a dead girl, whom her lover had just haled from her coffin, wrapped as she was in her cerements of the tomb; the other that of the lover. He had propped the body against the broken hillock of the grave, and he was chanting a love song to it which he accompanied on his lute. His face suggested the last stage of a galloping consumption, further enlivened by the fearsome light of insanity in his eyes. Some dreary bats flopped and lolloped through the air, and a few sympathetic toads came out to listen to the lay of the lover. The cypresses appeared as if they swayed and moaned to the music; and the rank weeds and grasses were mournfully tremulous around the sandalled feet of the forlorn musician.

Minola at first could not keep from shuddering. Then there followed a shocking inclination to laugh.

"What do you think of it?" Blanchet asked.

"Oh, I don't like it at all."

"No? It *is* trivial. Mere prettiness; just a striving after drawing-room popularity. No depth of feeling; no care for the realistic power of the scene. Pretty, pleasing—nothing more. Surface only; no depth."

"But it is hideous," Minola said.

"Hideous? Oh, no! Decay is loveliness; decay is the soul of really high art when you come to understand it. But there is no real decay there. That girl's face is pretty waxwork. There's no death there," and he turned half away in contempt. "That is what comes of being popular and a success. No; Delavar is done. I told him so."

"He is quite new to me," said Minola. "I never heard of him before."

"He's getting old now," Blanchet said. "He must be quite thirty. Let me see—oh, yes; fully that. He had better join the pre-Raphaelites now; or send to the Royal Academy; or hire a gallery and exhibit his pictures at a shilling a head. I fancy they would be quite a success."

Some of this conversation took place as they were making their way through the crowd with the intention of entering the drawing-room again. Minola was greatly amused and in a manner interested. The whole thing was entirely new to her. As they passed into the corridor, there were one or two vacant seats.

"Will you rest for a moment?" Blanchet said, motioning towards a seat.

"Hadn't we better go back for Mary?"

"We'll go back presently. She is very happy; she loves above all things observing a crowd."

Minola would have liked very much to observe the crowd herself and to have people pointed out to her. Blanchet, however, though he saluted several persons here and there, did not seem particularly interested in any of them. Minola sat down for a while to please him, and to show that she had no thought of giving herself airs merely because she was enabled to be kind to his sister.

Blanchet threw himself sidelong across his chair and leaned towards Minola's seat. He knew that people were looking at him and wondering who his companion was, and he felt very happy.

"I wish I might read some of my poems to you, Miss Grey," he said. "I should like to have your opinion, because I know it would be sincere."

"I should be delighted to hear them, but I don't think I should venture to give an opinion; my opinion would not be worth anything."

"When may I come and read one or two to you and Mary? To-morrow afternoon?"

"Oh, yes; we are staying here to-night, but we shall be at home in the afternoon. Are these published poems? Pray, excuse me—I quite forgot; you don't publish. You don't care for fame—the fame that sets other people wild."

He smiled, and slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"We don't care for the plaudits of the stupid crowd," he said; "that is quite true. We don't care for popularity, and to have our books lying on drawing-room tables, and kept by the booksellers bound in morocco ready to hand, to be given away as gift-books to young ladies. But we should like the admiration of a chosen few. The truth is, that I don't publish my poems because I haven't the money. They would be a dead loss, of course, to any one who printed them; I am proud to say that. I would not have them printed at all if they couldn't be artistically and fitly brought out; and I haven't the money, and there's an end. But if I might read my poems to you, that would be something."

Minola began to be full of pity for the poor poet, between whom and possible fame there stood so hard and prosaic a barrier. She was touched by the proud humility of his confession of ambition and poverty. Three sudden questions flashed through her mind. "I wonder how much it would cost? and have I money enough? and would it be possible to get him to take it?"

Her colour was positively heightening and her breath becoming checked by the boldness of these thoughts, when suddenly there was a rushing and rustling of silken skirts, and Lucy Money, disengaging herself from a man's arm, swooped upon her.

"You darlingest dear Nola, where have you been all the night? I have been hunting for you everywhere! Oh—Mr. Blanchet! I haven't seen you before either. Have you two been wandering about together all the evening?"

Looking up, Minola saw that it was Mr. Victor Heron who had been with Lucy Money, and that he was now waiting with a smile of genial friendliness to be recognised by Miss Grey. It must be owned that Minola felt a little embarrassed, and would rather—though she could not possibly tell why—not have been found deep in confidential talk with Herbert Blanchet.

She gave Mr. Heron her hand, and told him—which was now the truth—that she was glad to see him.

"Hadn't we better go and find Mary?" Blanchet said, rising and glancing slightly at Heron. "She will be expecting us."

"No, please don't take Miss Grey away just yet," Victor said, addressing himself straightway, and with eyes of unutterable cordiality and good-fellowship, to the poet. "I haven't spoken a word to her yet; and I have to go away soon."

"I'll go with you to your sister, Mr. Blanchet," said Lucy, taking his arm forthwith. "I haven't seen her all the evening, and I want to talk to her very much."

So Lucy swept away on Mr. Blanchet's arm, looking very fair, and *petite*, and pretty, as she held a bundle of her draperies in one hand, and glanced back, smiling and nodding out of sheer good nature at Minola.

Victor Heron sat down by Minola, and at once plunged into earnest talk.

## CHAPTER X.

### "THE POET IN A GOLDEN AGE WAS BORN."

VICTOR HERON did not leave Mrs. Money's quite as soon as he had intended. He had made a sort of engagement to meet some men in the smoking-room of his club: men with whom he was to have had some talk about the St. Xavier's Settlements. But he remained talking with Minola for some time; and he talked with Lucy and with other women, young and old, and asked many questions and made himself very agreeable, and, as was his wont, thought everyone delightful, and enjoyed himself very much. Then Mr. Money chanced to look in, and, seeing Heron, bore him away for a while to his study, to talk with him about something very, very particular. Mr. Money saw Herbert Blanchet and only performed with him the ceremony which Hajji Baba describes as "the shake-elbows and the fine weather," and then made no further account of him. Mr. Blanchet seeing Heron invited to the study, and knowing from his acquaintance with the household what that meant, conceived himself slighted, and was angry. Mr. Money always looked upon Blanchet as a sort of young man whom only women were ever supposed to care about, and who would be as much out of place in the private study of a politician and man of business as a trimmed petticoat.

There was, however, some consolation for the poet in the fact that he had Minola Grey nearly all to himself. He secured this advantage by a dexterous stroke of policy, for he attached himself to his sister and did his best to show and describe to her all the celebrities; and Minola, only too glad, came and sat by Mary, and they made a very happy trio. Herbert was inclined to look down upon his sister as a harmless, old-fashioned little spinster, who would be much better if she did not try to write poetry. He felt convinced for a while that Minola must have the same opinion of her in her secret heart, and would not think the less of him for showing it just a little. But when he found that Miss Grey took the poetess quite seriously, and had a genuine affection for her, his sister's value rose immensely in his eyes; he paid her great attention, and, as has been said, he had his reward.

It grew late; the rooms were rapidly thinning. Minola and Miss Blanchet were to remain at Mrs. Money's for the night. Blanchet could not stay much longer and had risen to go away, when Victor Heron entered. He came up to speak to Minola, and Minola introduced him to her particular friend and *camarade*, Miss Blanchet; and he sat beside Miss Blanchet and talked to her for a few moments, while Blanchet took advantage of the opportunity to talk again with Minola. Then Mr. Heron rose, and Herbert rose, and Mary Blanchet, growing courageous, told Heron that that was her brother and a great poet, and in a very formal old-fashioned way, begged permission to make them acquainted. Mr. Heron was a passionate admirer of poetry, and occasionally, perhaps, tried the patience of his friends by too lengthened citations from Shakespeare and Milton, but in modern poetry he had not got much later than "The Arab physician Karshish," which he could recite from end to end; and "In Memoriam," of which he knew the greater part. He was, however, modestly conscious that his administrative engagements in the colonies had kept him a little behind the rest of the world in the matter of poetry, and it did not surprise him in the least that a very great poet, whose name had never before reached his ears, should be there beside him in Mrs. Money's drawing-room. He felt delighted and proud at meeting a poet and a poet's sister.

It so happened that after saying his friendly good-night to his hostess—a ceremony which, even had the rooms been crowded, Mr. Heron would have thought it highly rude and unbecoming to omit—our fallen ruler of men found himself in Victoria Street with Mr. Blanchet.

"Are you going my way?" Heron asked him, with irrepressible sociability; "I am going up Pall Mall and into Piccadilly, and I shall be glad if you are coming the same way. Are you going to walk? I always walk when I can. May I offer you a cigar? I think you will find these good."

Herbert took a cigar, and agreed to walk Heron's way: which was, indeed, so far as it went, his own. Heron was very proud to walk with a poet.

"Yours is a delightful calling, sir," he said; "excuse me if I speak of it. I remember reading somewhere that one should never talk to an author about his works. But I couldn't help it: we don't meet poets in some of our colonies; and your sister was kind enough to enlighten my ignorance and tell me that you were a poet. I always thought that a charming anecdote of Wolfe reciting Gray's Elegy, and telling his officers he would rather have written that than take Quebec. Ay, by Jove, and so would I!"

Mr. Blanchet had never heard of the anecdote, and had by no means any clear idea as to the identity or exploits of Wolfe. But he was anxious to know something about Heron, and therefore he was determined to be as companionable as possible.

"You must not believe all my sister says about me. She has an extravagant notion of my merits in every way."

"It must be delightful to have a sister," Victor Heron said, enthusiastically. "Do you know, I can't imagine any greater happiness for a man than to have a sister. I envy you, Mr. Blanchet."

Heron was in the peculiar position of one to whom all the family relationships present themselves in idealised form. He had never had sister or brother; and a sister now rose up in his imagination as a sort of creature compounded of a simplified Flora MacIvor and a glorified Ruth Pinch. His novel-reading in the colonies was a little old-fashioned, like many of his ideas, and his habit of frequently using the word "sir" in talking with men whom he did not know very familiarly.

Mr. Blanchet was not disposed, from his knowledge of Mary Blanchet, to hold the possession of a sister as a gift of romantic or inestimable value. To say the truth, when Victor spoke so warmly of the delight of having a sister, he too was not setting up the poetess as an ideal. He was thinking rather of Miss Grey, and what a sister she would be for a man to confide in and have always with him.

Meanwhile Herbert, with all his self-conceit, had common sense enough to know that it would not do to leave Heron to find out from others that the great poet Blanchet had yet to make his fame.

"My sister and I have been a long time separated," he said;

"she lived in the country for the most part, and I had to come to London."

"Of course. The only place for a man of genius; a grand stage, Mr. Blanchet—a grand stage."

"So, of course, Mary is all the more inclined to make a sort of hero of me. You must not take her estimate of me, Mr. Heron. She fancies the outer world must think just as she does of everything I do. I am not a famous poet, Mr. Heron, and probably never shall be. I belong to a school which does not cultivate fame, or even popularity."

"I admire you all the more for that. It always seems to me that the poet degrades his art who hunts for popularity—the poet or anybody else for that matter," added Victor, thinking of his own unpopular performances in St. Xavier's Settlements. "I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Blanchet. I have seen so much hunting after popularity in England that I honour any man of genius who has the courage to set his face against it."

"My latest volume of poems," Blanchet said firmly, "I do not even mean to publish. They shall be printed, I hope, and set out in a manner becoming them—becoming, at least, what I think of them; but they shall not be hawked about book-shops, and reviewed by self-conceited ignorant prigs."

"Quite right, Mr. Blanchet; just what I should like to do myself, if I could possibly imagine myself gifted like you. But still you must admit that it is little to the credit of the age that a poet should be forced thus to keep his treasures from the public eye. Besides, it may be all very well, you know, in your case or mine; but think of a man of genius who has to live by his poems! It's easy talking for men who have enough—my enough, I confess, is a pretty modest sort of thing—but you must know better than I that there are young men of genius—ay, of real genius—trying to make a living in London by writings that perhaps their own generation will never understand. That is what seems to me the hard thing." Mr. Heron grew quite animated.

The words sent a keen pang through Blanchet's heart. His new acquaintance, whom Blanchet assumed to be confoundedly wealthy, evidently regarded him as a person equally favoured by fortune, and therefore only writing poetry to indulge the whim of his genius. Herbert Blanchet had heard from the Money women in a vague sort of way that Mr. Heron had been a governor of some place; it might have been Canada or India for aught he knew to the contrary; and he assumed that he must be a very aristocratic and self-conceited person. Blanchet would not for the world have admitted at that moment that he was poor; and he shuddered at the idea that Heron might somehow learn all about Mary Blanchet's official position in the court-house of Dukes-Keeton. For all the dignity of poetry and high art, Mr. Blanchet was impressed with a painful consciousness of being small, somehow, in the company of Mr. Heron. It was not merely because he supposed Heron to be wealthy, for he knew Mrs. Money was rich and that Lucy would be an heiress, and yet he was always quite at his ease with them, and accustomed to give himself airs and to be made much of; but it occurred to him that Mr. Heron's family, friends, and familiar surroundings would probably be very different from his; and he always found himself at home in the society of women, whom he knew that he could impress and impose on by his handsome presence. Yes, he felt himself rather small in the society of this pleasant, simple, unpretending young man, who was all the time looking up to him as a poet and a child of genius.

Greatly pleased was the poet and child of genius when Victor Heron asked him to come into his rooms and smoke a cigar before going to bed.

"You don't sleep much or keep early hours, I dare say, Mr. Blanchet; literary men don't, I suppose; and I only sleep when I can't help it. Let us smoke and have a talk for an hour or two."

"Night is my day," said Blanchet. "I don't think people who have minds can talk well in the hours before midnight. When I have to work in the day I sometimes close my shutters, light my gas, and fancy I am under the influences of night."

"I got the way of sitting up half the night," said Victor simply, "from living in places where one had best sleep in the day; but I am sure if I were a poet I should delight in the night for its own sake."

There was something curious in the feeling of deference with which Heron regarded the young poet. He considered Blanchet as something not quite mortal, or, at all events, masculine; something entitled to the homage one gives to a woman and the enthusiasm one feels to a spiritual teacher. Blanchet did not seem to him exactly like a man; rather like one of those creatures compounded of fire and dew whom we read of in legend and mythology. The feeling was not that of awe, because Blanchet was young and good-looking, and wore a dress coat and white tie, and it is impossible to have a feeling of awe for a man with a white tie. It was a feeling of delicate consideration and devotion. Had some rude person jostled against or otherwise insulted the poet as they passed along, Victor would have felt it his duty to interpose and resent the affront as promptly as if Minola Grey or Lucy Money were the object of the insult. To his unsophisticated colonial mind the poet was the sweet feminine voice of the literary grammar.

Heron occupied two or three rooms on the drawing-room floor of one of the streets running out of Piccadilly. He paid, perhaps, more for his accommodation than a prudent young man beginning the world all over again would have thought necessary; but Heron could not come down all at one step from his dignity as a sort of colonial governor, and he considered it, in a manner, due to the honour of England's administrative system that he should maintain a gentlemanlike appearance in London whilst still engaged in fighting his battle—the battle which had not yet begun. Besides, as he had himself told Minola Grey, his troubles thus far were not money troubles. He had means enough to live like a modest gentleman even in London, provided he did not run into extravagant tastes of any kind, and he had saved, because he had had no means of spending it, a good deal of his salary while in the St. Xavier's Settlements. He had engaged a servant when he established himself in his lodgings; and his condition seemed to Blanchet, when they entered the drawing-room together, and the servant was seen to be quietly busy in anticipating his master's wants, to be that of an easy opulence whereof, in the case of young bachelors, he had little personal knowledge. It was very impressive for the moment. Genius, and originality, and the School quailed at first before respectability, West-End rooms, and a manservant.

The adornments of the room were, to Mr. Blanchet's thinking, atrocious. They were, indeed, only of the better-class London-lodgings style; mirrors and gilt and white and damask. There were doors where there ought to have been curtains, carpets where artistic feeling would have prescribed mats or rugs; there were no fans, not to say on the ceiling, but even on the walls. The only suggestion of art in the place was a plaster cast of the Venus of the Louvre which Heron himself had bought, and which in all simplicity he adored. Mr. Blanchet held, first, that all casts were nefarious, and next, that the Venus of Milo as a work of art was beneath contempt. One of the divinities of his school had done the only Venus which Art could acknowledge as her own. This was, to be sure, a picture, not a statue; but in Mr. Blanchet's mind it had settled the Venus question for ever. The Lady Venus was draped from chin to toes in a snuff-coloured gown, and was represented as seated on a rock, biting the nails of a lank, greenish hand; and she had sunken cheeks, livid eyes, and a complexion like that of the prairie sage-grass. Any other Venus made Herbert Blanchet shudder.

The books scattered about were dispiriting. There were Shakespeare, Byron, and Browning. Mr. Blanchet had never read

Shakespeare, considered Byron below criticism, and could hardly restrain himself on the subject of Browning. There were histories, and Mr. Blanchet scorned history; there were Blue-books, and the very shade of blue which their covers displayed would have made his soul sicken. It will be seen, therefore, how awful is the impressiveness of respectability when, with all these evidences of the lack of artistic taste around him, Mr. Blanchet still felt himself dwarfed somehow in the presence of the occupier of the rooms. It ought to be said, in vindication of Mr. Heron, that the poor youth was in nowise responsible for the adornments of the rooms, except in so far as his plaster cast and his books were concerned. He had never, up to this moment, noticed anything about the lodgings, except that the rooms were pretty large, and that the locality was convenient for his purposes and pursuits.

The two young men had some soda and brandy, and smoked and talked. Blanchet was the poorest hand possible at smoking and drinking, but he swallowed soda and brandy in repeated doses, while his host's glass lay still hardly touched before him. One consequence was that his humbled feeling soon wore off, and he became eloquent on his own account, and patronising to Heron. He set our hero right upon every point connected with modern literature and art, whereon it appeared that Heron had hitherto possessed the crudest and most old-fashioned notions. Then he declaimed some of his own shorter poems, and explained to Heron that there was a conspiracy among all the popular and successful poets of the day to shut him out from public notice, until Heron felt compelled, by a sheer sense of fellow-feeling in grievance, to start up and grasp his hand, and vow that his position was enviable in comparison with that of those who had leagued themselves against him.

"But you must hear my last poem; you *shall* hear it," Herbert said magnanimously.

"I shall be delighted; I shall feel truly honoured," murmured Victor in perfect sincerity. "Only tell me when."

"The first reading—let me see—yes, the *first* reading is pledged to Miss Grey. No one," the poet grandly went on, "can hear it before she hears it."

"Of course not—certainly not; I shouldn't think of it," the dethroned ruler of St. Xavier's Settlements hastened to interpose. "What a noble girl Miss Grey is! You know her very well, I suppose?"

"I look upon her," said the poet gravely, "as my patron saint." He threw himself back in his chair, raised his eyes to the ceiling, murmured to himself some words which sounded like a poetic prayer, and swallowed his soda and brandy.

Victor thought he understood, and remained silent. His heart swelled with admiration, sympathy, and an entirely innocent, unselfish envy.

"Still," the poet said, rising in his chair again, "there is no reason why you should not hear the poem at the same time. I am going to-morrow to read the poem to Minola—to Miss Grey—and Mary. I am sure they will both be delighted if you will come with me and hear it."

"I should like it of all things, of course; but I don't know whether I ought to intrude on Miss Grey. I understood from her that she rather prefers to live to herself—with her friends, of course—and that she does not desire to have visitors."

"You may safely come with me," the poet proudly said. "I'll call for you to-morrow, if you like."

Victor assumed that he might safely accept the introduction of his new acquaintance, and the appointment was made.

If Mr. Heron could under any possible circumstances have been brought to admit to himself that the society of a poet was a little tiresome, he might perhaps have acknowledged it in the present instance. The good-natured young man was quite content for the present to sink and even to forget his own grievance in presence of the grievances of his new acquaintance. His own trouble seemed to him but small in comparison. What, after all, was the misprizing of the political services of an individual, in the face of a malign or stupid lack of appreciation which might deprive the world and all time of the outcome of a poet's genius? Heron began now to infer that his new friend was poor, and the conviction made him more and more devotedly sympathetic. He was already dimly revolving in his mind a project for the publication of Blanchet's poems at the risk or expense of a few private friends, of whom he was to be the foremost. Some persons have a genius, a heaven bestowed faculty, for the transfer of their own responsibilities and cares to other minds and shoulders. Already two sympathetic friends of a few hours' standing are separately taking thought about the publication of Mr. Blanchet's poems without risk or loss to Mr. Blanchet. Still, it must be owned that Mr. Blanchet's company was growing a little of a strain on the attention of his present host. Blanchet knew absolutely nothing of politics or passing events of any kind in the outer world, and did not affect or pretend to care anything about them. Indeed, had he been a man of large and liberal information in contemporary history, he would in all probability have concealed his treasures of knowledge, and affected an absolute and complacent ignorance. Outside the realms of what he called Art, Mr. Blanchet thought it utterly beneath him to know anything; and within his own realm he knew so much, and bore down with such a terrible dogmatism, that the ordinary listener sank oppressed beneath it. Warmed and animated by his own discourse, the poet poured out the streams of his dogmatic eloquence over the patient Heron, who strained every nerve in the effort to appreciate, and in the honest desire to acquire, exalted information.

At last the talk came to an end, and even Blanchet got somehow the idea that it was time to be going away. Victor accompanied him as far as the doorway, and they stood for a moment looking into the silent street.

"You haven't far to go, I hope?"

"No, not far; not exactly far," the poet answered. "I'll find a cab, I dare say. To-morrow, then, you'll come with me to Miss Grey's? You needn't have any hesitation; you will be quite welcome, I assure you. I'll call for you."

"Come to breakfast, then, at twelve."

"All right," the complacent Blanchet answered, his earlier awe having given place to an easy familiarity; "I'll come."

He nodded, and went his way. Victor Heron looked for a while after his tall, slender, and graceful figure.

"He's a handsome fellow," Heron said to himself, "and a poet, and I can easily imagine a girl being in love with him, or any number of girls. She is a very fine girl, quite out of the common track. She must be very happy. I almost envy him. No, I don't; what on earth have I to do with such nonsense?"

He returned to his room, and sat thinking for a while. All his political worrying and grievance-mongering seemed to have lost character somehow, and become prosaic, and unsatisfying, and vapid. It did not seem much to look forward to, that sort of thing going on for ever.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE GAY SCIENCE IN A NEW ILLUSTRATION.

Mary Blanchet was, for the time, one of the happiest women on the earth, when she had to bestir herself, on her returning home next day, to make preparations for the test-reading of her brother's poems. To hear Herbert's poems read was a delight which could only be excelled by the pride and joy of having them read to such an audience. She had so long looked up to Minola as a leader and a princess, that she at last came to regard her as the natural arbitress of the destiny of anyone belonging to the Blanchet family. In some vague way she had made up her mind that, if Miss Grey only gave the word of command, the young poet's works must go forth to the world, and going forth must of course be estimated at their proper worth. Her pride was double-edged. On this side, there was the poet-brother to show to her friend ; on that side, the friend who was to be the poet-brother's patroness. Her "animula vagula, blandula," floated all that day on the saffron and rose clouds of rising joy and fame.

Nor was her gratification at all diminished when Herbert Blanchet called very early to crave permission to bring Mr. Heron with him, and when he obtained it. Blanchet had thought it prudent not to rely merely on the close friendship with Miss Grey of which he had spoken a little too vauntingly to Victor the night before, and it seemed to him a very necessary precaution to call and ask permission to introduce his friend. He was fortunate enough to find Minola not only willing, but even what Mary might have thought, if she had considered the matter, suspiciously willing, to receive Mr. Heron. In truth, Minola had in her mind a little plot to do a service to Mary Blanchet and her brother in the matter of the poems, and she had thought of Mr. Heron as the kindliest and likeliest person she knew to give her a helping hand in the carrying out of her project. Mary, not thinking anything of this, was yet made more happy than before by the prospect of having a handsome young man for one of the audience. As has been said already, she had the kindliest feelings to handsome young men. Then the presence of another listener would make the thing quite an assembly ; almost, as she observed in gentle ecstasy more than once to Minola, as if it were one of the poetic contests of the Middle Ages, in which minstrels sang and peerless ladies awarded the prize of song.

So she busied herself all the morning to adorn the rooms and make them fit for the scenes of a poet's triumph. She started away to Covent Garden and got pots of growing flowers and handfuls of "cut flowers," to scatter here and there. She had an old guitar which she disposed on the sofa with a delightfully artistic carelessness, having tried it in all manner of positions before she decided on the final one, in which the forgetful hand of the musician was supposed to have heedlessly dropped it. All the books in the prettiest bindings—especially poems—she laid about in conspicuous places. Any articles of apparel—bonnets, wraps, and such like, that might upon an ordinary occasion have been seen on tables or chairs—were carefully stowed away in their proper receptacles—except, indeed, for a bright-coloured shawl, which, thrown gracefully across an arm of the sofa, made, in conjunction with the guitar, quite an artistic picture in itself. Near the guitar, too, in a moment of sudden inspiration, she arranged a glove of Nola's—a glove only once worn, and therefore for all pictorial effect as good as new, while having still the pretty shape of the owner's hand expressed in it. What can there be, Mary Blanchet thought, more winsome to look at, more suggestive of all poetic thought, than the carelessly-lying glove of a beautiful girl? But she took good care not to consult the owner of the glove on any such point, dreading with good reason Minola's ruthless scorn of all shams and pre-arranged affectations.

Mary was a little puzzled about the art fixtures, if such an expression may be used, of the room; the framed engravings, which belonged to the owner of the house and were let with the lodgings, of which they were understood to count among the special attractions. She had a strong conviction that her brother would not admire them, would think meanly of them, and say so; and although Minola herself now and then made fun of them, yet it did not by any means follow that she should be pleased to hear them disparaged by a stranger. About the wall-paper she was also a little timorous, not feeling sure as to the expression which its study might call into her brother's critical eye. She could not, however, remove the engravings, and doing anything with the paper was still more completely out of the question. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to hope that his poetry and his audience would so engross the poet, as to deprive his eyes of perception for cheap art and ill-disciplined colours.

There was to be tea, delightfully served in dainty little cups, and Mary could already form in her mind an idea of the graceful figure which Minola would make as she offered her hospitality to the poet. An alarm, however, began to possess her as the day went on about the possibility of Minola not being home in time for the reception of the strangers. In order that she might have the place quite to herself to carry out her little schemes of decoration, the artful poetess had persuaded Minola not to give up her usual walk in the park; and now suppose Minola forgot the hour, or lost her way, or was late from any cause and had not time to make any change in her walking dress, or actually did not come in until long after the visitors had arrived! What on earth was she, Mary, to do with them?

This alarm, however, proved unfounded. Minola came back in very good time, looking healthy and bright, with some rain-drops on her hair, and putting away with good-humoured contempt all suggestions about an elaborate change of dress. Miss Blanchet would have liked her leader to array herself in some sort of way that should suggest a queen of beauty or princess of culture or other such imposing creature. At all events, she would have liked trailing skirts and much perfume. She only sighed when Minola persisted in showing herself in very quiet costume.

The rattle of a hansom cab was heard at last—at last, Mary thought—in reality a few minutes before the time appointed ; and the poet and Mr. Heron entered. The poet was somewhat pale, and a little preoccupied. He had a considerable bulk of manuscript in his hand. The manuscript was in itself a work of art, as he had already explained to Victor. Each page was a large leaf of elaborately rough and expensive paper, and the lines of poetry, written out with exquisitely careful penmanship, occupied but a small central plot, so to speak, of the field of white. The margins were rich in quaint fantasies of drawing by the poet himself and various artists of his brotherhood. Sometimes a thought, or incident, or phrase of the text was illustrated on the margin in a few odd, rapid strokes. Sometimes the artist, without having read the text, contributed some fancy or whimsy of his own ; sometimes it was a mere monogram, sometimes a curious perplexed pictorial conceit : now, merely the face of a pretty woman, and again, some bewildering piece of eccentric symbolism, about the meaning whereof all observers differed. It must be owned that, as Minola looked at these ornaments of the manuscript, she could not help feeling a secret throb of satisfaction at the evidence they gave that the reading would not be quite so long as the first sight of the mass of paper had led her to expect.

Mr. Blanchet did not do much in the way of preliminary conversation. He left all that to Minola and Victor ; and the latter was seldom wanting in talk when he believed himself to have sympathetic listeners. It should be said that the well-ordered guitar-effect proved a failure, for Mr. Blanchet, soon after entering the room, flung himself into what was to have been a poetic attitude on the sofa, and came rather awkwardly on the guitar, and was a little vexed at the thought of being made to seem ridiculous.

Everyone was anxious that a beginning of the reading should be made, and no one seemed to know exactly how to start it. Suddenly Mr. Blanchet arose, as one awakened from a dream.

" May I beg, Miss Grey, for three favours ? "

Minola bowed, and waited.

" First. I cannot read by daylight. My poems are not made for day. They need a peculiar setting. May I ask that the windows be closed, and the lamps lighted? I see you have lamps.'

"Certainly, if you wish;" and Minola promptly rang the bell.

"Thank you very much. In the second place, I would ask that no sign of approval or otherwise be given as I read. The whole must be the impression, not any part. It must be felt as a whole, or it is not felt at all. Until the last line is read no judgment can be formed."

This was discouraging and even depressing, but everybody promised. Minola in particular began to fear that poets were not so much less objectionable than other men, as she had hoped. She could not tell why, but as she listened to the child of genius, she was filled with a strange memory of Mr. Augustus Sheppard. Everything that seemed formal and egotistic reminded her of Mr. Augustus Sheppard.

"Then," continued Herbert, "when I have finished the last line, you will, perhaps, allow me to leave you at once, without formality, and without even speaking? I ask for no sudden judgment; that I shall hear another time, too soon, perhaps," and he indulged in a faint smile. "But I prefer to go at once, when I have read a poem; it is a peculiarity of mine," and he passed his hand through his hair. "Reading excites me, and I am overwrought. It may not be so with others, but it is so with me."

"I can quite understand," the good-natured Victor hastened to say. "Quite natural—quite so. I have often worked myself into such a state of excitement, thinking of things—not poetry, of course, but colonial affairs, and such dry stuff—that I have to go out at night, perhaps, and walk in the cool air, and recover myself. Don't you feel so, sometimes, Miss Grey?"

"Oh, no; I am neither poet nor politician, and I have nothing to think about." At the moment she thought Blanchet a sham, and Heron rather a weak and foolish person for encouraging him. What would you have of men?

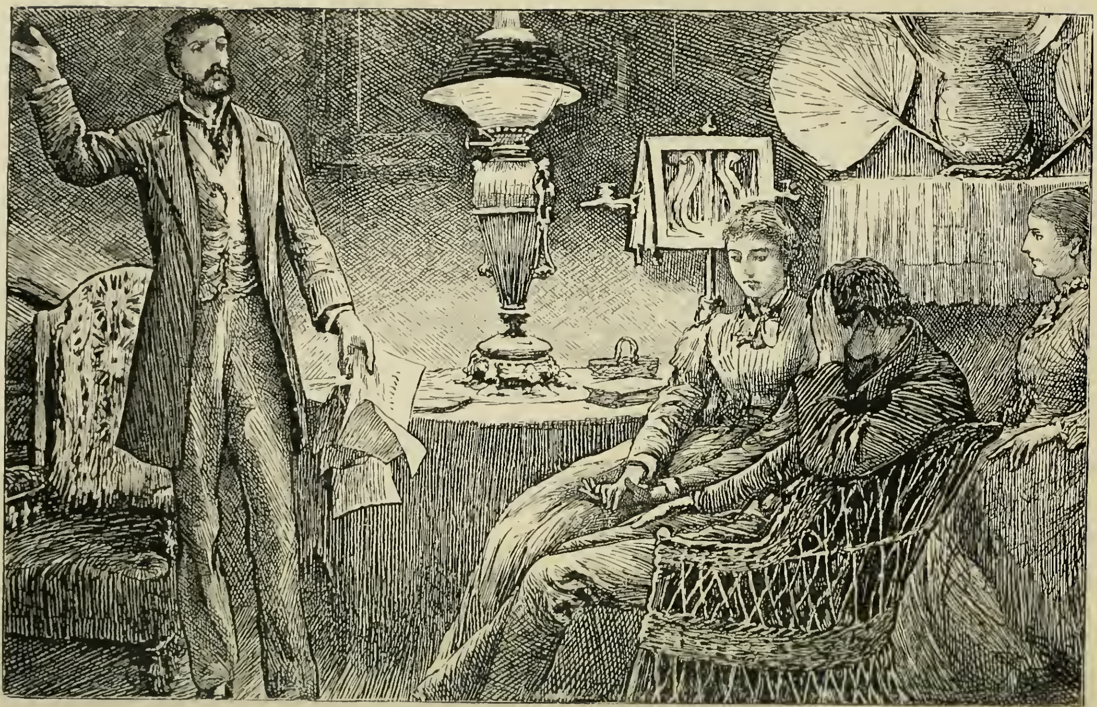
"I have felt so, often," Mary Blanchet said, with a gentle sigh.

Miss Grey did not doubt that people felt so; that everybody might feel so under appropriate conditions. It was the deliberate arranging of preliminaries by Mr. Blanchet that vexed her; it seemed so like affectation and play-acting. She was prepared to think his poetry rubbish.

It was not rubbish, however; not mere rubbish, by any means. Mr. Blanchet had a considerable mastery of the art of arranging together melodious and penetrating words, and he caught up cleverly and adopted the prevailing idea and purpose of the small, new group of yet hardly known artists in verse and colour to whom it was his pride to belong. His poems belonged to what might be called the literature of disease. In principle, they said to corruption, "Thou art my father," and to the worm, "Thou art my mother and my sister." They dealt largely in graves and corpses, and the loves of skeletons, and the sweet virtues of sin, and the joys of despair and dyspepsia. They taught that there is no truth but paradox. Mr. Blanchet read his contributions with great effect; in a voice now wailing, now threatening, now storming fiercely, now creeping along in tones of the lowest hoarseness. What amazed Minola was, to find that any man could have so little sense of the ridiculous, as to be able to go through such a performance in a small room before three people. In a crowd there might be courage; but before three! It was wonderful. She felt horribly inclined to laugh; but the gleaming eyes of the poet alighted on hers and fastened them every now and then; and poor Mary, too, she knew, was watching her.

It was very trying to her. She endeavoured to fill her mind with serious and sad thoughts; and she could not keep herself from thinking of the scene in Richter's *Flegeljahre*, where the kin of the eccentric testator are trying in fierce rivalry who shall be the first to shed a tear for his loss, in presence of the notary and the witnesses, and thereby earn the legacy to which that exasperating condition was attached. After all, it is probably easier to restrain a laugh than to pump up a tear, especially when the coming of the tear must bring the drying glow of a glad success with it. Minola's condition was bearable; and indeed, when she saw the genuine earnestness of the poet, her inclination to laugh all died away, and she became filled with pity and pain. Then she tried hard to admire the verses, and could not. At first the conceits and paradoxes were a little startling, and even shocking, and they made one listen. But the mind soon became attuned to them and settled down, and was stirred no more. Once you knew that Mr. Blanchet liked corpses, his peculiarity became of no greater interest than if his liking had been for babies. When it was made clear that what other people called hideousness, he called beauty, it did not seem to matter much more than honest Faulconbridge's determination, if a man's name be John, to call him Peter.

The poet sometimes closed his eyes for a minute together, and pressed his hand upon his brow, while drops of perspiration stood distinctly on his livid forehead. But he took breath again, and went on. He evidently thought his audience could not have enough of it. The poem was, in fact, a chaplet of short poem-beads. Many of its passages had the peculiarity that they came to a sudden end exactly when the listeners supposed that the interest



*"He evidently thought his audience could not have enough of it."*

of the thing was only going to begin. When a page was ended the poet lifted it, so to speak, with the sudden effort of one hand and arm, as though it were something heavy like a shield, and then flung it from him, looking fixedly into the eyes of some one of the three listeners the while. This formality impressed Mary Blanchet immensely. It seemed the very passion and wrestling of poetic inspiration; the prophetic fury rushing into action through the prophet.

Minola once or twice glanced at the face of Victor Heron. At first it was full of respectful and anxious attention, animated now and then by a sudden flicker of surprise. Of late these feelings and moods had gradually changed, and after a while the settling-down condition had clearly arrived. At length Miss Grey could see that, while Mr. Heron still maintained an attitude of the most courteous attention, his ears were decidedly with his heart, and that was far away—with his own grievance and the St. Xavier's Settlements.

At last it was over. The close, for all their previous preparation, took the small audience by surprise. It came thus :—

I asked of my soul—What is death?
I asked of my love—What is hate?
I asked of decay—Art thou life?
And of night—Art thou day?
Did they answer?

The poet looked up with eyes of keen and almost fierce inquiry. The audience quailed a little, but, not feeling the burden of response thrown upon them, resumed their expectant attitudes, waiting to hear what the various oracles had said to their poetic questioner. But they were taken in, if one might use so homely an expression. The poem was all over. That was the beginning and the end of it. The poet flung away his last page, and sank dreamy, exhausted, back into his chair. A moment of awful silence succeeded. Then he gathered up his illuminated scrolls, rose from his chair, bowed gravely, and left the room. Mary Blanchet hurried after him.

Minola was perplexed, depressed, and remorseful. She thought there must be something in the productions which made their author so much in earnest, and she was afraid she had not seemed attentive enough, or that Blanchet had detected her in her early inclination to smile. There was an embarrassed pause when Victor and she were left together.

"He reads very well," Heron said at last. "A capital reader, I think—don't you? He throws his soul into it. That's the great thing."

"It is," said Minola, "if it's much to throw—Oh, I don't know what I mean by that. But, how do you like the poems?"

"Well, I am sure they must be very fine. I should rather hear the judgment of some one else. I should like to hear you speak first. You tell me what you think of them, and then I'll tell you, as the children say."

"I don't care about them," said Minola, shaking her head sadly. "I have tried, Mr. Heron; but I can't admire them. I can't see any originality, or poetry, or anything in them. I could not admire them—unless a command came express from the Queen to tell me to think them good."

"So you read the *Misanthrope*—Molière's *Misanthrope*?" Victor said eagerly—having caught in a moment Minola's whimsical allusion to the duty of a loyal critic when under royal command.

"Yes, I used to pass half my time reading it; I have almost grown into thinking that I have a sort of copyright in it; Alceste is my chief hero, Mr. Heron."

"I wish I were like him," said Mr Heron.

"I wish you were," she answered gravely.

"But I am not—unfortunately."

"Unfortunately," she repeated, determined to pay no compliment.

"You must let me come some day and have a long talk with you about Molière," Victor said, nothing discouraged, having wanted no compliment, nor thought of any.

"I shall be delighted: you shall talk, and I will listen. I am so glad to find a companion in Molière. But I wish I could have admired Mr. Blanchet's poems. I prefer my own ever so much."

"Your own!" The audacious self-complacency of the announcement astonished him, and seemed out of keeping with Miss Grey's character and ways. "Do you write poems?"

"Oh, no; if I did, I don't think I could admire them."

"But how then—what do you mean?"

"Well, one can feel such poetry in every blink of sunshine even in this West Centre, and every breath of wind, and every stray recollection of some great book that one has read—when one was young, you know. That poetry is never brought to the awful test of being written down and read out. I do so feel for Mr. Blanchet; I suppose his poems seemed glorious before they were written out."

"But I think they seem glorious to him even still."

"They do—and to Mary. Mr. Heron, tell me honestly and without affectation—are you really a judge of poetry?"

"Not I," said Heron. "I adore a few old poets and one or two new ones, but I couldn't tell why—and those that I admire everybody else admires too, so that I can't pretend to myself that I have any original judgment. My opinion, Miss Grey, isn't worth a rush."

"I am very glad to hear it—very. Neither is mine. So you see we may be both of us quite mistaken about Mr. Blanchet's poems."

"Of course we may—I dare say we are: in fact, I am quite sure we are," said Heron, growing enthusiastic.

"Anyhow, it is possible. Now, I have been thinking"——

"Yes, you have been thinking?"

"I don't know whether I am only going to prove myself a busybody; but I am so fond of Mary Blanchet."

"Yes: quite right; so am I—I mean, I like her very much. But what do you think of doing?"

"Well, if one could do anything to get these poems published or brought out in some way—if it could be done without Mr. Blanchet's knowledge, or if he could be got to approve of it, and was not too proud?"

"All that I have been thinking of already," Victor said. "I do think it's a shame that a fellow shouldn't have a chance of fighting his battle for the want of a few wretched pounds."

"How glad I am now that I spoke of this to you! Then if I get up a little plot, you'll help me in it?"

"I'll do everything—delighted."

"But first you must understand me. This is for my dear old friend Mary Blanchet—not for Mr. Blanchet: I don't particularly care about him, in that sort of way, and I fancy that men generally can take care of themselves; but I can't bear to have Mary Blanchet disappointed, and that is why I want to do something. Now will you help me?—I mean, will you help me in my way?"

"I will help in any way you like, so long as I am allowed to help at all. But I don't quite understand what you mean."

"Don't you? I wish you did without being told so very, very clearly. Well, my Mary Blanchet is proud: and though she might accept for her brother a helping hand from me, it would be quite a different thing where a stranger was concerned. In plain English, Mr. Heron, whatever money is to be paid must be paid by me; or there shall be no plot. Now you understand."

"Yes, certainly; I quite understand your feelings. I should have liked"——

"No doubt: but there are so many things one could have liked. The thing is now, will you help me—on my conditions?"

"Of course I will: but what help can I give, as you have ordered things?"

"There are ever so many things to do which I couldn't do, and shouldn't even know how to go about: seeing publishers and printers, and all that kind of work."

"All that I'll do with pleasure; and I am only sorry that you limit me to that. May I ask, Miss Grey, how old are you?"

"What on earth has that to do with the matter? Shall you have to give the publishers a certificate of my birth?"

"No, it's not for that. But you seem to me a very young woman, and yet you order people and things as if you were a matron."

Minola smiled and coloured a little. "I have lived an odd and lonely sort of life," she said, "and never learned manners: perhaps that is the reason. If I don't please you, Mr. Heron—frankly, I shan't try."

There was something at once constrained and sharp in her manner, such as Heron had not observed before. She seemed changed somehow as she spoke these unpropitiatory words.

"Oh, you do please me," he said; "sincere people always please me. Remember that I, too, admire the *Misanthrope*."

"Yes, very well; I am glad that you agree to my terms;—and we are fellow-conspirators."

"We are, and"——

"Stop! here comes Mary."

Mary Blanchet came back. Her face had a curiously deprecating expression. She herself had been filled with wonder and delight by the reading of her brother's poems; but she had known Minola long enough to be as sensitive to her moods and half-implied meanings, as the dog who catches from one glance at his master's face the knowledge of whether the master is or is not in a temper suited for play. Mary had done her very best to reassure her brother; but she had not herself felt quite satisfied about Minola's admiration.

"Well?" Mary said, looking beseechingly at Minola, and then appealingly at Victor, as if to ask whether he would not come to the rescue: "Well?"

"We have been talking," Minola said, with a resolute effort, "we have been talking—Mr. Heron and I—about your brother's poems, Mary; and we think that the public ought to have a chance of judging of them."

"Oh, thank you!" Mary exclaimed, and she clasped her hands fervently.

"Yes, Mr. Heron says he is clear about that."

"I was sure Mr. Heron would be," said Mary, with becoming pride in her brother. She was not eager to ask any more questions, for she felt convinced that when Minola Grey said the poems ought to go before the public, they would somehow go; and she saw fame for her brother in the near distance. She thought she saw something else, too, as well as fame. The interest which Minola took in Herbert's poems must surely betoken some interest in Herbert himself. Mary knew well enough, too, that there is nothing which so disposes some women to love men as the knowledge that they are serving and helping the men. This subject of love the little poetess had long and quaintly studied. She had followed it through no end of pomes and romances, and lain awake through long hours of many nights considering it. She had subjected it to severe analysis, bringing to the aid of the analysing process that gift of imagination which it is rarely permitted to the hard scientific enquirer to employ to any purpose. She had pictured herself as the object of all manner of wooings, under every conceivable variety of circumstances. Love by surprise; love by the slow degrees of steady growth; love pressed upon her by ardent youth; gravely tendered by a dignified maturity which, until her coming, had never known such passion; love bending down to her from a castle, looking up to her from the cottage of the peasant;—love in every form had tried her in fancy, and she had pleased and vexed herself in conjuring up its various effects upon her susceptibility. But the general result of the poetess's self-examination was to show that the love which would most keenly touch her heart would be that which was born of passion and compassion united. He, that is to say, whom she had helped, and patronised, and saved, would be the man she best could love. Perhaps Mary Blanchet's years had something to do with this turn of feeling. The unused emotions of the maternal went, in her breast, to blend with and make up the equally unsatisfied sentiments of love: and her vague idea of a lover was that of somebody who should be husband and child in one.

Anyhow the result of all this, in the present instance, was that Mary felt a sudden and strong conviction that to allow Minola Grey to do Herbert a kindly service was a grand thing gained towards inducing Minola to fall in love with him.

So the three conspirators fell to making their arrangements. The parts were easily divided. Mr. Heron was to undertake the business of the affair, to see publishers and printers and so forth; Mary Blanchet was to undertake, or at least endeavour, to obtain the consent of her brother, whose proud spirit might perhaps revolt against such patronage, even from friendly hands. Miss Grey was to bear the cost. It was soon a very gratifying thing to the conspirators to know that no objection whatever was likely to come from Mr. Blanchet. The poet accepted the proffered favour not only with readiness but with joy, and was particularly delighted and flattered when he learned from Mary—what Mary was specially ordered not to tell him—that Miss Grey was his lady patroness. He was to have been allowed vaguely to understand that friends and admirers—whose name might have been Legion—were combined to secure justice for him. But Mary, in the pride of her heart, told him all the truth, and her brother was greatly pleased and very proud. The only stipulation he made was that the poems should be brought out in a certain style, with such paper, such margins, such bindings, and so on : according to the pattern of another poet's works, whereof he was to furnish a copy.

"She will be rich one day, Mary," he said, "and she can afford to do something for Art."

"Will she be rich?" Mary asked eagerly. "Oh, I am so glad! She ought to be a princess ; she should be, if I were a queen."

"Yes, she'll be rich—what you and I would call rich," he said carelessly. "Everything is to be hers, when the stepmother dies ; and I believe she is in a galloping consumption."

"How do you know, Herbert?"

"You asked me to enquire, you know," he said, "and I did enquire. It was easily done. Her father left his money and things to his second wife only for her life ; when she dies, everything comes to your friend ; and I hear the woman can't live long. Keep all that to yourself, Mary."

"I am sure Minola doesn't know anything about it. I know she never asked nor thought of it."

"Very likely, and the old people would not tell her. But it's true for all that. So you see, Mary, we can afford to have justice done to these poems of mine. If they are stones of any value, let them be put in proper setting or not set at all. I am entitled to ask that much."

## CHAPTER XII.

### "LOVE, THE MESSENGER OF DEATH."

VICTOR HERON seemed to Minola about this time in a fair way to let his great grievance go by altogether. He was filled with it personally when he had time to think about it, but the grievances of somebody else were always coming across his path, and drawing away his attention from his own affairs. Minola very soon noticed this peculiarity in him, and at first could hardly believe in its genuineness; it so conflicted with all her accepted theories about the ingrained selfishness of man. But by watching and studying his ways, which she did with some interest, she found that he really had that unusual weakness, and she was partly amused and partly annoyed by it. She felt angry with him now and then for neglecting his own task, like another Hylas, to pick up every little blossom of alien grievance flung in his way. She pressed on him with an earnestness which their growing friendship seemed to warrant the necessity of his doing something to set his cause right or ceasing to tell himself that he had a cause which called for justice.

It would not be easy to find a more singular friendship than that which was growing up between Miss Grey and Victor. She received him whenever he chose to come and see her. Many a night when Mary Blanchet and she sat together he would look in upon them as he went to some dinner-party, or even as he came home from one, if he had got away early, and have a few minutes' talk with them. He came often in the afternoon, and if Minola did not happen to be at home, he would nevertheless remain and have a long chat with Mary Blanchet. He seemed always in good humour with himself and everybody else, except in so far as his grievance was concerned, and always perfectly happy. It has been already shown that, although quite a young man, he considered himself, by virtue of his experience and his public career, ever so much older than Minola. Once or twice he sent a throb of keen delight through Mary Blanchet's heart by speaking of something that "I can remember, Miss Blanchet, and perhaps you may remember it—but Miss Grey couldn't of course." To be put on anything like equal ground with him as to years was a delightful experience to the poetess. It was all the more delicious because there was such an evident genuineness in his suggestion. Of course, if he had meant to pay her a compliment—such as a foolish person might be pleased with, but not she, thank goodness—he would have pretended to think her as young as Minola. But he had done nothing of the kind; and he evidently thought that she was about the same age as himself.

At all events, and it was more to the purpose, he set down Miss Grey as belonging to quite a different stage of growth from that to which he had attained. He thought her a handsome and very clever girl, who had the additional advantage over most other girls that she was rather tall, and that he therefore was not compelled to stoop much when speaking to her. He liked women and girls generally. He hardly ever saw the woman or girl he did not like. If he had known that a woman was insincere or affected, he would not have liked her; but then he never knew it; he never saw it; it never occurred to him. Anybody could have seen that he was a man who had no sisters or girl-cousins. The most innocent and natural affectations of womanhood were too deep for him to see. There really was a great deal of truth in what he had said to Minola about his goddess theory as regarded women. He made no secret about his greatly admiring her—thinking her very clever and fresh and handsome. He would without any hesitation have told her that he liked her best of all the women he knew, but then he had often told her that he liked other women very much. He seemed therefore the man whom a pure and fearless woman, even though living in Minola's odd condition of semi-isolation, might frankly accept as a friend without the slightest fear for the tranquillity of his heart or of hers. Minola, too, had always in her own breast resented with anger and contempt the idea that a man and woman can never be brought together and allowed to walk in the beaten way of friendship without their forthwith wandering off into the thickets and thorny places of love. All such ideas she looked upon as imbecility, and scorned. "I don't like men," she used to say to herself and even to others pretty freely. "I never saw a man fit to hold a candle to my Alceste. I never saw the man who seemed to me worth a woman's troubling her heart about." She began to say this of late more than ever, and to say it to herself, especially when the day and the evening had closed and she was alone in her own room. She said it over almost as if it were a sort of charm.

The business of the poems now gave him many occasions to call, and one particular afternoon Victor called when, by a rare chance, Mary Blanchet happened to be out of doors. Minola had had it on her mind that he was not pushing his cause very earnestly, and was glad of the opportunity of telling him so. He listened with great good humour. It is nearly as agreeable to be lectured as to be praised by a handsome young woman who is unaffectedly interested in one's welfare.

"I shall lose my good opinion of you if you don't keep more steadily to your purpose."

"But I do keep steadily to it. I am always thinking of it."

"No; you allow anything and everything to interfere with you. Anybody's affairs seem more to you than your own."

Victor shook his head.

"That isn't the reason," he said. "I wish it were, or anything half so good. No; the truth is, that I get ashamed of the cursed work of trying to interest people in my affairs who don't want to take any interest in them. I am a restless sort of person and must be doing something, and my own business is now in that awful stage when there is nothing practical or active to be done with it. I find it easier to get up an appearance of prodigious activity about some other person's affairs. And then, Miss Grey, I don't mind confessing that I am rather sensitive and morbid—egotistic, I suppose—and if anyone looks coldly on me when I endeavour to interest him in my own affairs, I take it to heart more than if it were the business of somebody else I had in hand."

"But you talked at one time of appealing to the public. Why don't you do that?"

"Get people to bring my case on in the House of Commons?"

"Yes; why not?"

"It looks like being patronised and protected and made a client of."

"Well, why don't you try and get the chance of doing it yourself."

He smiled. "I still do hold to that idea—or that dream. I should like it very much, if one only had a chance. But no chance seems to turn up; and one loses heart sometimes."

"Oh, no," Minola said earnestly, "don't do that."

"Don't do what?"

He had hardly been thinking of his own words, and he seemed a little surprised at the earnestness of her tone.

"Don't lose heart. Don't give way. Don't fall into the track of the commonplace and become like every one else. Keep to your purpose, Mr. Heron, and don't be beaten out of it."

"No; I haven't the least idea of that, I can assure you: quite the contrary. But it is so hard to get a chance, or to do anything, all at once. Everything moves so slowly in England. But I have a plan—we are doing something."

"I am very glad. You seem to me to be doing nothing for yourself."

"Do I? I can assure I am much less Quixotic than you imagine. Now, I am so glad to hear that you still like the Parliamentary scheme, because that is the idea that I have particularly at heart, and if the idea comes to anything there are some reasons why you should take a special interest in it."

"Are there really? May I be told what they are?"

"Well, the whole thing is only in prospect and uncertainty just yet. The idea is Money's, not mine; he has found out that there is going to be a vacancy in a certain borough," and Victor smiled and looked at her, "before long; and his idea is, that I should become a candidate, and tell the people my whole story right out, and ask them to give me a chance of defending myself in the House. But the thing is not yet in shape enough to talk much about it. Only I thought you would be glad to know that I haven't thrown up the sponge all at once."

Minola did not very clearly follow all that he had been saying; partly because she was beginning to be afraid that to put herself into the position of adviser and confidante to this young man was a scarcely becoming performance on her part. Her mind was a little perturbed, and she was not a very good listener then. Some people say that women seldom are good listeners; that while they are playing the part of audience they are still thinking how they look as performers. Anyhow, Minola was now growing anxious to escape from her position.

"I am so glad," she said vaguely, "that you are doing something, and that you don't mean to allow yourself to be beaten."

"I don't mean to be, I assure you," he said, a little surprised at her sudden coolness. "I shouldn't like to be. That isn't my way, I hope."

"I hope not too, and I think not; I wish I had such a purpose. Life seems to me such a pitiful thing—and in a man especially—when there is no great clear purpose in it."

"But is a man's trying to get himself a new appointment a great clear purpose?" he asked with a smile. He was now trying to draw her out again on the subject, having been much pleased with the interest she seemed to take in him, and a little amused by the gravity with which she tendered her advice.

"No, but yours is not merely trying to get an appointment. You are trying to have justice done to your past career and to get an opportunity of being useful again in the same sort of way. You don't want to lead an idle life, lounging about London. Mr. Blanchet has his poems; Mr. Money has—well, he has his business, whatever it is, and he is in Parliament."

At this moment the servant entered and handed a card to Minola. A gentleman, she said, particularly wished to see Miss Grey, but he would call any time she pleased to name if she could not see him at present. Minola's cheek grew red as she glanced at the card, for it bore the name of Mr. Augustus Sheppard, and it had the words pencilled on it: "Wishes particularly to see you—has important business." Her lips trembled. Nothing could be more embarrassing and painful than such a visitation. The disagreeable memory of Mr. Sheppard and of the part of her life to which he belonged had been banished from her thoughts, at least except for occasional returning glimpses, and now here was Mr.

Sheppard himself in London, and asserting a right to see her. She could not refuse him, for he did, perhaps, come to her with some message from those in Keeton who still would have called themselves her family. Mary Blanchet had only just gone out, and Minola was left to talk to Mr. Sheppard alone. For a moment she had a wild idea of begging Victor Heron to stay and bear her company during the interview. But she put this thought away instantly, and made up her mind that she had better hear what Mr. Sheppard had to say alone.

"Show the gentleman in, Jane," she said, as composedly as she could. "A friend—at least, a friend of my people, from my old place, Mr. Heron."

Heron was looking at her, she thought, in a manner that showed he had noticed her embarrassment.

"Well, I must wish you a good morning," Mr. Heron said; "be sure I shan't forget what you were saying."

"Thank you—yes; what was I saying?"

"Oh, the very good advice you were giving me; and I propose to hear it all out another time. Good morning."

"Don't go for a moment, pray don't," she asked with an earnestness which surprised Victor. "Only a moment—I would rather you didn't go just yet."

The thought suddenly went through her that Mr. Sheppard was the very man to put an exaggerated meaning on the slightest thing that seemed to hint at secresy of any kind, and that she had better take care to let him see, face to face, what sort of visitor was with her when he came. Victor was glad in any case of the chance of remaining a few moments longer, and was in no particular hurry to go so long as he could think he was not in anybody's way.

Victor Heron stood, hat in hand, on the hearth-rug near the chimney-piece. As Mr. Sheppard entered, Heron was the first person he happened to see, and the entirely unexpected sight surprised him. He glanced confusedly from Heron to Minola before he spoke a word, and his manner, always stiff and formal, seemed to acquire in a moment an additional incubus of constraint. Victor Heron had something about him which did not seem exactly English and which to a provincial mind might well suggest the appearance of a foreigner—a Frenchman. Mr. Sheppard had never felt quite satisfied in his own mind about that mysterious rival of whom Minola spoke to him on the memorable day when he saw her last. She had told him that her Alceste was only "a man who lived in a book, Mr. Sheppard—in what you would call a play." How well he remembered the very words she used, and the expression of contempt on her lips as she used them! And he had got the book—the play—and read it; toiled through it, and found that there was an Alceste in it. So far she had told the truth, no doubt; but might not the Alceste have a living embodiment, or might she not have found since that time a supposed realisation of her Alceste, and might not this be he—this handsome, foreign-looking young man, who was lounging there as coolly and easily as if the place belonged to him? For a moment an awful doubt filled his mind. Could she be married? was that her husband?

"Miss Grey?" he said in hesitating and questioning tone, as that of one who is not quite clear about the identity of the person he is addressing; but Mr. Sheppard was only giving form unconsciously to the doubt in his own mind, Are you still Miss Grey?

The words and their tone were rather fortunate for Minola. They amused her and seemed ridiculous, although she did not guess at Mr. Sheppard's real meaning, and they enabled her to get back at once to her easy contempt for him.

"You must have forgotten my appearance very soon, Mr. Sheppard," she said, in a tone which carried the contempt so lightly and easily that he probably did not perceive it, "or I must have changed very much, if you are not quite certain whether I am Miss Grey. You have not changed at all; I should have known you anywhere."

"It is not that," Mr. Sheppard said with a little renewal of cheerfulness. "I should have known you anywhere, Miss Grey. You have not changed, except indeed that you have, if that were possible, improved. Indeed, I would venture to say that you have decidedly improved."

"Thank you: you are very kind."

"It would be less surprising if you, Miss Grey, had had some difficulty in recognising me. Fortune, perhaps, has withdrawn some of her blessings from others only to pour them more lavishly on you."

"I feel very well, thank you; but I hope fortune has not been robbing any Peter to pay Paul in my case. You, at least, don't seem to have been cheated out of any of your good health, Mr. Sheppard."

While he made his little formal speeches Mr. Sheppard continued to glance sidelong at Victor Heron. Mr. Heron now left his place at the chimney-piece, and came forward to take his leave.

"Must you go?" Minola asked with as easy a manner as she could assume. She dreaded a *tête-à-tête* with Sheppard, and she also dreaded to let it be seen that she dreaded it. If Mary Blanchet would only come!

An expedient occurred to her for putting off the dreaded conversation yet a moment, and giving Mary Blanchet another chance.

"I should like my friends to know each other," Minola said, with a gaiety of manner which was hardly in keeping with her natural ways. "People are not introduced to each other now, I believe, when they meet by chance in London, but we are none of us Londoners. Mr. Sheppard comes from Keeton, Mr. Heron, and is one of the oldest friends of my family."

Mr. Heron held out his hand with eyes of beaming friendliness.

"Mr. Heron?" Sheppard asked slowly, "Mr. Victor Heron?"

"Victor Heron, indeed!"

"Mr. Victor Heron, formerly of the St. Xavier's Settlements?"

Heron only nodded this time, finding Mr. Sheppard's manner not agreeable. Minola wondered what her townsman was thinking of, and how he came to know Heron's name and history.

"Then my name must surely be known to you, Mr. Heron. The name of Augustus Sheppard, of Dukes-Keeton?"

"No, sir," Heron replied, "I am sorry to say that I don't remember to have heard the name before."

"Indeed!" Mr. Sheppard said, with a formal smile, intended to be incredulous and yet not to seem too plainly so; "yet we are rivals, Mr. Heron."

Minola started and coloured.

"At least, we are to be," Mr. Sheppard went on—"if rumour in Dukes-Keeton speaks the truth. I am not wrong in assuming that I have the honour of addressing the future Radical—I mean Liberal—candidate for that borough?"

"Oh, that's it!" Heron said carelessly, "yes, yes: I didn't know that rumour had yet troubled herself about the matter so much as to speak of it truly or falsely. But, of course, since you have heard it, Mr. Sheppard, it's no secret. I have some ideas that way, Miss Grey. I intend to try whether I can impress your townspeople. This gentleman, I suppose, is on the other side."

"I am the other side," Mr. Sheppard said gravely. "I am to be the Conservative candidate—I was accepted by the party as the Conservative candidate, no matter who the Radical may be."

"Well, Mr. Sheppard, we shall not be the less good friends, I hope," Heron said cheerily; "I can't be expected to wish that the best man may win, for that would be to wish failure for myself, but I wish the better cause may win, and in that you will join me. Good morning, Miss Grey!"

The room seemed to grow very chilly to Minola when his bright smile and sweet courteous tones were withdrawn, and she was left with her old lover.

There was not much in Sheppard's appearance to win her back to any interest in him. He did not compare advantageously with Victor Heron. When Heron left the room, the light seemed to have gone out; Heron was so fresh, so free, so sweet, and yet so strong, full of youth, and spirit, and manhood, a natural gentleman without the insipidity of the manners of society. Poor Augustus Sheppard was formal, constrained, and prosaic; he had not even the dignity of austerity. He was not self-sufficing; he was only self-sufficient. As he stood there he was awkward, and almost cowed. He seemed as if he were afraid of the girl, and Minola was woman enough to be angry with him because he seemed afraid of her. He was handsome, but in that commonplace sort of way which in a woman's eyes is often worse than being ugly. Minola felt almost pitiless towards him, although the girl's whole nature was usually full of pity, for, as has already been said, she did not believe in his affection, and thought him a thorough sham. He stood awkwardly there, and she would not relieve him from his embarrassment by saying a word.

"Well, Miss Grey," he began at last, "I suppose you hardly expected to see me."

"I did not know you were in town, Mr. Sheppard."

"I fear I am not very welcome," he said, with an uncomfortable smile; "but your mother particularly wished me to see you."

"My mother, Mr. Sheppard!" Minola grew red with pain and anger.

"I mean your stepmother, of course—the wife of your father."

"Once the wife of my father; now the wife of somebody else."

"Well, well! at all events, the person who might be naturally supposed to have the best claim to some authority—or influence; influence, let us say—over you."

"Has Mrs. Saulsbury sent you to say that she thinks she ought to have some influence over me?"

"Oh, no," he answered with that gentle deprecation of anger which is usually such fuel to anger's fire. "Mrs. Saulsbury has given up any idea of the kind long since—quite long since, I assure you. I think, if you will permit me to say it, that you were always a little unjust in your judgment of Mrs. Saulsbury. She is a true-hearted and excellent woman."

Minola said nothing. Perhaps she felt that she never had been quite in a position to do impartial justice to the excellence and the true-heartedness of Mrs. Saulsbury.

"But," Mr. Sheppard resumed, with a gentle motion of his hands, as if he would wave away now all superfluous and hopeless controversy, "That is not what I came to say."

Minola bowed slightly to signify that she was glad to know he was coming to the point at last.

"Mrs. Saulsbury is in very weak health, Miss Grey; something wrong with the lungs, I fear."

Minola was not much impressed at first. It was one of Mrs. Saulsbury's ways to cry "wolf!" very often as regarded the condition of her lungs; and up to the time of Minola's leaving, people had not been in serious expectation of the wolf's really putting his head in at the door.

Mr. Sheppard saw in Minola's face what she did not say.

"It is something really serious," he said. "Mr. Saulsbury knows it, and every one. You have not been in correspondence with them for some time, Miss Grey."

"No," said Miss Grey—"I wrote, and nobody answered my letter."

"I am afraid it was regarded as—as"——

"Undutiful perhaps?"

"Well,—unfriendly. But Mrs. Saulsbury now fears—or rather knows, for she is too good a woman to fear—that the end is nigh, and she wishes to be in fullest reconciliation with every one."

"Oh, has she sent for me?" Minola said, with something like a cry, all her coldness and formality vanishing with her contempt. "I'll go, Mr. Sheppard, oh yes, at once! I did not know—I never thought that she was really in any danger."

Poor Minola! with all her wild-bird freedom and her pride in her lonely independence and her love of London, there yet remained in her that instinct of home, that devotion to the principle of family and authority, that she would have done homage at such a moment, and with something like enthusiasm, to even such a simulacrum of the genius of home as she had lately known. Something had passed through her mind that very day as she talked with Heron, and feared she had talked too freely; something that had made her think with vague pain of yearning on the sweetness of a sheltered home. Her heart beat as she thought, "I will go to her—I will go home; I will try to love her."

Mr. Sheppard dispelled her enthusiasm. "Mrs. Saulsbury did not exactly express a wish to see you."

"Oh!"

"In fact, when that was suggested to her—I am sure I need hardly say that I at once suggested it—she thought, and perhaps wisely, that it would be better you should not meet."

Minola drew back, and stood as Mr. Heron had been standing near the chimney-piece. She did not speak.

"But Mrs. Saulsbury begged me to convey to you the assurance of her entire and cordial forgiveness."

Minola bowed gravely.

"And her hope that you will be happy in life and be guided towards true ends, and find that peace which it has been her privilege to find."

Minola bore all this without a word.

"What shall I say to her from you?" he asked. "Miss Grey, remember that she is dying."

The caution was not needed.

"Say that I thank her," said Minola, in a low subdued tone "Say that, after what flourish your nature will, Mr. Sheppard. I suppose I was wrong as much as she; I suppose it was often my fault that we did not get on better. Say that I am deeply grieved to hear that she is so dangerously ill, but that I hope—oh, so sincerely!—that she may yet recover."

Mr. Sheppard looked into her eyes with puzzled wonder. Was she speaking in affected meekness; or in irony, as was her wont? Was the proud, rebellious girl really so gentle and subdued? Could it be that she took thus humbly Mrs. Saulsbury's pardon? Yes, it seemed all genuine. There was no constraint on the lines of her lips; there was no scorn in her eyes. In truth, the sympathetic and generous heart of the girl was touched to the quick. The prospect of death sanctified the woman who had been so hard to her, and turned her cold self-complacent pardon into a blessing. If the dying are often the most egotistic and self-complacent of all human creatures, and are apt to make of their very condition a fresh title to lord it for the moment over the living—as if none had ever died before, and none would die after them, and therefore the world must pay special attention and homage to them—if this is so, Minola did not then know it or think about it.

The one thing on earth which Mr. Sheppard most loved to see was woman amenable to authority. He longed more passionately than ever to make Minola his wife.

"There is something else on which I should like to have your permission to speak," he said; and his thin lips grew a little tremulous. "But I could come another time, if you preferred."

"I would rather you said now, Mr. Sheppard, whatever you wish to say to me."

"It is only the old story. Have you reconsidered your determination—you remember that last day—in Keeton? I am still the same."

"So am I, Mr. Sheppard."

"But things have changed—many things; and you may want a home; and you may grow tired of this kind of life—and I shan't be a person to be ashamed of, Minola! I am going to be in Parliament, and you shall hear me speak—and I know I shall get on. I have great patience. I succeed in everything—I really do."

She smiled sadly and shook her head.

"In everything else, I do assure you, so far—and I may even in that; I must, for I have set my heart upon it."

She turned to him with a glance of scorn and anger. But his face was so full of genuine emotion, of anxiety and passion and pain, that its handsome commonplace character became almost poetic. His lips were quivering; and she could see drops of moisture on his shining forehead, and his eyes were positively glittering, as if in tears.

"Don't speak harshly to me," he pleaded, "for I don't deserve it. I love you with all my heart, and to-day more than ever—a thousand times more—for you have shown yourself so generous and forgiving—and—and like a Christian."

Then for the first time the thought came, a conviction, into her mind—"He really is sincere!" A great wave of new compassion swept away all other emotions.

"Mr. Sheppard," she said, in softened tones, "I do ask of you not to say any more of this. I couldn't love you, even if I tried, and why should you wish me to try? I am not worth all this—I tell you with all my heart that I am not worth it, and that you would think so one day if I were foolish enough to—to listen to you. Oh! indeed you are better without me. I wish you every success and happiness. I don't want to marry."

"Once," he said, "you told me there was no one you cared for but a man in a book. I wonder, is that so now?"

In spite of herself, the colour rushed into Minola's face. It was a lucky question for her, however unlucky for him, because it recalled her from her softer mood to natural anger.

"You can believe me in love with anyone you please to select in or out of a book, Mr. Sheppard, so long as it gives you a reason for not persecuting me with your own attentions. I like a man in a book better than one out of it; it is so easy to close the book and be free of his company when he grows disagreeable."

She did not look particularly like a Christian then, probably, in his eyes. He left her, his heart bursting with love and anger. When Mary Blanchet returned, she found Minola pale and haggard, her eyes wasted with tears.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A MAN OF THE TIME.

Several days passed away, and Minola heard no more from Mr. Sheppard. She continued in a state of much agitation; her nerves, highly strung, were sharply jarred by the news of the approaching death of Mrs. Saulsbury. It was almost like watching outside a door, and counting the slow, painful hours of some lingering life within, while yet one may not enter and look upon the pale face, and mingle with the friends or the mourners, but is shut out and left to ask and wait: it was like this, the time of suspense which Minola passed, not knowing whether the wife of her father was alive or dead. As is the way of all generous natures, it was now Minola's impulse to accuse and blame herself because there had been so little of mutual forbearance in her old home at Keeton. She kept wondering whether things might not have gone better, if she had said and done this or that; or, if she had not said and done something else. Full of this feeling, she wrote a long emotional letter to Mr. Saulsbury, which she begged of him to read to his wife, if she were in a condition to hear it. The letter was suffused with generous penitence and self-humiliation. It was a letter which perhaps no impartial person could have read without becoming convinced that its writer must have been in the right in most of the controversies of the past.

The letter did not reach the eyes or ears for which it was particularly intended. Minola received a coldly forgiving answer from Mr. Saulsbury—forgiving her upon his own account, which was more than Minola had sought,—but adding, that he had not thought it desirable to withdraw, for a moment, by the memory of earthly controversies, the mind of his wife from the contemplation of that well-merited heaven which was opening upon her. Great goodness has one other advantage in addition to all the rest over unconverted error—it can, out of its own beatification, find a means of rebuking those with whom it is not on terms of friendship. The expected ascent of Mrs. Saulsbury into heaven became another means of showing poor Minola her own unworthiness. Mr. Saulsbury closed by saying that Mrs. Saulsbury might linger yet a little, but that her apotheosis (this, however, was not his word) was only a question of days.

There was nothing left for Minola but to wait, and now accuse and now try to justify herself. Many a time there came back to her mind the three faces on the mausoleum in Keeton, the symbols of Life, Death, and Eternity; and she could not help wondering whether the mere passing through the portal of death could all at once transfigure a cold, narrow-minded, peevish, egotistical human creature into the soul of lofty calmness and ineffable sweetness, all peace and love, which the sculptor had set out in his illustration of Humanity's closing state.

Meantime, she kept generally at home, except for her familiar walks in the park, and her now less frequent visits to the British Museum and to South Kensington. Lucy Money, surprised at her absence, hunted her up, to use Lucy's own expression, and declared that she was looking pale and wretched, and that she must come over to Victoria Street, and pass a day or two there, for companionship and change. Mary Blanchet, too, pressed Minola to go; and at last she consented, not unwilling to be taken forcibly out of her self-inquisition and her anxieties for the moment. She had made no other acquaintances, and seemed resolute not to make any; but there was always something peculiarly friendly and genial to her in the atmosphere of the Moneys' home. The whole family had been singularly kind to her, and their kindness was absolutely disinterested. Minola could not but love Mrs. Money, and could not but be a little amused by her; and there was something very pleasing to her in Mr. Money's strong common sense and blunt originality. Minola liked, too, the curious little peeps at odd groupings of human life which she could obtain by sitting for a few hours in Mrs. Money's drawing-room. All the *Schwärmerei* of letters, politics, art, and social life seemed to illustrate itself "in little" there.

Minola, when she accompanied Lucy to her home, was taken by the girl up and down to this room and that to see various new things that had been bought, and the two young women entered Mrs. Money's drawing-room a little after the hour when she usually began to receive visitors. A large lady, who spoke with a very deep voice, was seated in earnest conversation with Mrs. Money.

"This is my darling, sweet Lucy, I perceive," the lady said in tones of soft rolling thunder as the young women came in.

"Oh! Lady Limpenny!"

"Come here, child, and embrace me! But this is not your sister? My sight begins to fail me so terribly; we must expect it, Mrs. Money, at our time of life."

Lucy tossed her head at this, and could hardly be civil. She was always putting in little protests, more or less distinctly expressed, against Lady Limpenny's classification of Mrs. Money and herself as on the same platform in the matter of age, and talking so openly of "their time of life." In truth, Mrs. Money was still quite a young-looking woman, while Lady Limpenny herself was a remarkably well-preserved and even handsome matron, a little perhaps too full-blown, and who might at the worst have sat fairly enough for a portrait of Hamlet's mother, according to the popular dramatic rendering of Queen Gertrude.

"No ; this young lady is taller than Theresa. I can see that, although I have forgotten my glass. I always forget or mislay my glass."

"This is Miss Grey—Miss Minola Grey," said Mrs. Money. "Lady Limpenny, allow me to introduce my dear young friend, Miss Minola Grey."

"Dear child, what a sweet pretty name! Now tell me, dearest, where did your people find out that name? I should so like to know."

"I think it was found in Shakespeare," Minola answered ; "it was my mother's choice, I believe."

"A name in the family, no doubt. Some names run in families. I dare say you have had a—what is it?—Minola—in your family in every generation. One cannot tell the origin of these things—I have often thought of making a study of family names. Now, my name—Laura—there never was a generation of our family; we are the Atomleys—there never was a generation of the Atomleys without a Laura. Now, how curious, in my husband's family—Sir James Limpenny—in every generation one of the girls was always called by the pet name of 'Chat.' Up to the days of the Conquest, I do believe—or is it the Confessor, perhaps?—you would find a Chat Limpenny."

"There is a Chat Moss somewhere near Manchester," said Lucy saucily, still not forgiving the remark about the time of life. "We crossed it once in a railway."

"Oh, but that has nothing to do with it, Lucy darling—nothing at all. I am speaking of girls, you know—girls called by a pet name. I dare say that name was in my husband's family—oh, long before the place you speak of was ever discovered. But now, Miss Grey, do pray excuse me again—such a very charming name—Minola! but pray do excuse me, may I ask is that hair all your own? One is curious, you know, when one sees such wonderful hair."

"Yes, Lady Limpenny," Minola said imperturbably; "my hair is all my own."

"I should think Nola's hair was all her own, indeed," Lucy struck in. "I have seen her doing it a dozen times; not likely that she would put on false hair."

"But, my sweet child, I do assure you that's nothing now," the indomitable Lady Limpenny went on. "Almost everybody wears it now—it's hardly any pretence any more. That's why I asked Miss Grey—because I thought she perhaps wouldn't mind, seeing that we are only women, we here. And it is such wonderful hair—and it is all her own!"

"Yes," murmured Lucy, "all her own; and her teeth are her own too; and even her eyes."

"She has beautiful eyes indeed—you have, my dear," the good-natured Lady Limpenny went on, having only caught the last part of Lucy's interjected sentence. "But that does not surprise one; at least, I mean, when we see lovely eyes, we don't fancy that the wearer of them has bought them in a shop—but hair is very different,—and that is why I took the liberty of asking this young lady. But now, my darling Theresa Money, may I ask again about your husband? Do you know that it was to see him particularly I came to-day—not you. Yes, indeed! But you are not angry with me—I know you don't mind; I do so want to have his advice on this very, very important matter."

"Lucy, dear, will you ask your papa if he will come down for a few moments—I know he will—to see Lady Limpenny."

Mr. Money's ways were well known to Lady Limpenny. He grumbled if disturbed by a servant, unless there was the most satisfactory and sufficient reason, but he would put up with a great deal of intrusion from Lucelet. The very worst that could happen to Lucelet was to have one of her pretty ears gently pulled. So Lucy went to disturb him unabashed, although she knew he was always disposed to chaff Lady Limpenny.

"But you really don't mean to say that you are going to part with all your china—with your uncle's wonderful china?" Mrs. Money asked, with eyes of almost tearful sympathy, resuming the talk which Minola's entrance had disturbed.

"My darling, yes! I must do it! It is unavoidable."

Minola assumed that this was some story of sudden impoverishment, and she could not help looking up at the lady with wondering and regretful eyes, although not knowing whether she ought to have heard the remark, or whether she was not a little in the way.

Lady Limpenny caught the look.

"This dear young lady is sympathetic, I know, and I am sure she loves china, and can appreciate my sacrifice. But it ought not to be a sacrifice: it is a duty—a sacred duty."

"But is it?" Mrs. Money pleaded.

"Dearest, yes! My soul was in danger. I was in danger every hour of breaking the First Commandment! My china was becoming my idolatry! There was a blue set which was coming between me and Heaven. I was in danger of going on my knees to it every day. I found that my whole heart was becoming absorbed in it! One day it was borne in upon me; it came on me like a flash. It was the day I had been to hear Christie and Manson" ——

"To hear what?" Mrs. Money asked in utter amazement.

"Oh, what have I been saying? Christie and Manson! My dear, that only shows you the turn one's wandering, sinful thoughts will take! I mean, of course, Moody and Sankey;—what a shame to confuse such names."

"Oh, Moody and Sankey," Mrs. Money said again, becoming clear in her mind.

"Well, it flashed upon me there that I was in danger; and I saw where the danger lay. Darling, I made up my mind that moment! When I came home, I rushed—positively rushed—into Sir James's study. 'James,' I said, 'don't remonstrate, pray don't; my mind is made up—I'll part with all my china.'"

"Dear me!" Mrs. Money gently observed. "And Sir James—what did he say?"

"Well," Lady Limpenny went on, with an air of disappointment, "he only said 'All right,' or something of that kind. He was writing, and he hardly looked up. He doesn't care." And she sighed.

"But how good he is not to make any objection!"

"Yes, oh yes; he is the best of men. But he thinks I won't do it, after all."

Mrs. Money smiled.

"Now, Theresa Money, I wonder at you! I do really. Of course I know what you are smiling at—you, too, believe I won't do it. Do you think I would sacrifice my soul — deliberately sacrifice my soul—even for china? You, dearest, might have known me better."

"But would one sacrifice one's soul?"

"Darling, with my temperament, yes! Alas, yes! I know it; and, therefore, I am resolved. Oh, here is Mr. Money. But not alone!"

Mr. Money entered the room, but not alone, indeed, for there came with him a very tall man, whom Minola did not know; and then, a little behind them, Lucy Money and Victor Heron. Mr. Money spoke to Lady Limpenny, and then, with his usual friendly warmth, to Minola; and then he presented the new-comer, Mr. St. Paul, to his wife.

Mr. St. Paul attracted Minola's attention from the first. He was very tall, as has been said, but somewhat stooped in the shoulders. He had a perfectly bloodless face, with keen, bold blue eyes; his square, rather receding forehead showed deep horizontal lines when he talked, as if he were an old man; and he was nearly bald. His square chin and his full firm lips were bare of beard or moustache. He might at times have seemed an elderly man, and yet one soon came to the conclusion that he was a young man looking prematurely old. There was a curious hardihood about him, which was not swagger, and which had little of carelessness, or, at all events, of joyousness, about it. He was evidently what would be called a gentleman, but the gentleman seemed somehow to have got mixed up with the rowdy. Minola promptly decided that she did not like him. She could hear Mr. St. Paul talking in a loud, rapid, and strident voice to Mrs. Money, apparently telling her, off-hand, of travel and adventure.

Lady Limpenny had seized possession of Mr. Money, and was endeavouring to get his advice about the sale of her china, and impress him with a sense of the importance of saving her soul. Minola was near Mrs. Money, and had just bowed to Victor Heron, when Mr. St. Paul turned his blue eyes upon her.

"This is your elder daughter, I presume," he said; "may I be introduced, Mrs. Money? Your husband told me she was not so handsome as her sister, but I really can't admit that."

Mrs. Money was not certain for a moment whether her daughter Theresa might not have come into the room, but when she saw that he was looking at Miss Grey, she said, in her deep tone of melancholy kindness,—

"No, this is not my daughter, Mr. St. Paul; and even with all a mother's partiality, I have to own that Theresa is not nearly so handsome as this young lady. Miss Grey, may I introduce Mr. St. Paul? Miss Grey comes from Dukes-Keeton. Mr. St. Paul and you ought to be acquaintances."

"Oh, you come from Dukes-Keeton, Miss Grey!" and he dropped Mrs. Money, and drew himself a chair next to Minola. "So do I—I believe I was born there. Do you like the old place?"

"No; I don't think I like it."

"Nor I; in fact, I hate it. Do you live there now?"

She explained that she had now left Keeton for good, and was living in London. He laughed.

"I left it for good long ago, or for bad. I have been about the world for ever so many years; I've only just got back to town. I've been hunting in Texas, and rearing cattle in Kansas—that sort of thing. I left Keeton because I didn't get on with my people."

Minola could not help smiling at what seemed the odd similarity in their history.

"You smile because you think it was no wonder they didn't get on with me, I suppose? I left long ago—cut and run long before you were born. My brother and I don't get on; never shall, I dare say. I am generally considered to have disgraced the family. He's going back to Keeton, where he hasn't been for years; and so am I, for a while. He's been travelling in the East, and living in Italy, and all that sort of thing, while I've been hunting buffaloes and growing cattle out West."

"Are you going to settle in Keeton now?" Miss Grey asked, for lack of anything else to say.

"Not I; oh, no! I don't suppose I could settle anywhere now. You can't, I think, when you've got into the way of knocking about the world. I don't know a soul down there now, I suppose. I'm going to Keeton now chiefly to annoy my brother." And he laughed a laugh of half-cynical good humour, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"A Christian purpose," Miss Grey said.

"Yes, isn't it? We were always like that, I assure you; the elders and the youngers never could hit it off—always quarrelling. I'm one of the youngers, though you wouldn't think so to look at me, Miss Grey? Do look at me."

Miss Grey looked at him very composedly. He gazed into her bright eyes with undisguised admiration.

"Well, I'm going to thwart my good brother in Keeton. He's coming home, and going to do all his duties awfully regular and well, don't you know; and first of all, he's going to have a regular, good, obedient Conservative member—a warming-pan. Do you understand that sort of thing? I believe the son of some honest poor-rate collector, or something of that sort—a fellow named Sheppard. Did you ever hear of any fellow in Keeton named Sheppard?—Jack Sheppard, I shouldn't wonder."

"I know Mr. Augustus Sheppard, and he is a very respectable man."

"Deuce he is! but not a lively sort of man, I should think."

"No; not exactly lively."

"No; he wouldn't suit my brother if he was. Hope he isn't a friend of yours? Well, we're going to oppose him for the fun of the thing. How very glad my brother will be to see me. I am afraid I pass for a regular scamp in the memories of you Keeton people. You must have heard of me, Miss Grey. No? Before your time, I suppose. Besides, I didn't call myself St. Paul then; I took on that name in America; it's my mother's family name;—

that's how you wouldn't remember about me, even if you had heard. You know the mausoleum in the park, I dare say?"

"Very well indeed. It used to be a favourite place with me."

"Ah, yes, my last offence was shooting off pistols there, aiming at the heads over the entrance, you know. One of them will carry my mark to his last day, I believe."

"Yes; I remember noticing that the face of Death has a mark on it—a small hole."

He laughed again.

"Just so. That's my mark. Poor father! It was the great whim of his life to build that confounded thing, and he didn't enjoy it after all. My brother, I am told, proposes to occupy part of it in good time. They won't put me there, you may be sure."

"Your brother is the Duke?" Minola said, a faint memory returning to her about a wild youth of the family who had had to leave the army in some disgrace, and went away somewhere beyond seas.

"Yes; I thought I told you, or that Money had mentioned it. Yes; I was the good-for-nothing of the family. You can't imagine, though, what a number of good-for-nothings are doing well out Denver City way, out in Colorado. When I was there, there were three fellows from the Guards, and some fellows I knew at Eton. all growing cattle, and making money, and hunting buffalo, and potting Indians, and making themselves generally as happy as sandboys. I've made money myself, and might have made a lot more, I dare say."

Mr. St. Paul evidently delighted to hear himself talk.

"It must be a very dangerous place to live in," Minola said, wishing he would talk to somebody else.

"Well, there's the chance of getting your hair raised by the Indians. Do you know what that means—having your hair raised?"

"I suppose being scalped."

"Exactly. Well, that's a danger. But it isn't so much a danger if you don't go about in gangs. That's the mistake fellows make, they think it's the safe thing to do, but it isn't. Go about in parties of two, and the Indians never will see you—never will notice you."

Minola's eyes happened at this moment to meet those of Heron.

"You know Heron?"

"Oh, yes; very well."

"A good fellow—very good fellow, though he has such odd philanthropic fads about niggers and man and a brother, and all that sort of thing. Got into a nice mess out there in St. Xavier's, didn't he?"

"I heard that his conduct did him great honour," Minola said warmly.

"Yes, yes—of course, yes; if you look at it in that sort of way. But these black fellows, you know, it really isn't worth a man's while bothering about them. They're just as well off in slavery as not—deuced deal better, I think; I dare say some of their kings and chiefs think they have a right to sell them if they like. I told Heron at the time I wouldn't bother if I were he. Where's the use, you know?"

"Were you there at the time?" Minola asked, with some curiosity.

"Yes, I was there. I'd been in the Oregon country, and I met with an accident, and got a fever, and all that; and I wanted a little rest and a mild climate, you know; and I made for San Francisco, and some fellows there told me to go to these Settlements of ours in the Pacific, and I went. I saw a good deal of Heron—he was very hospitable and that, and then this row came on. He behaved like a deuced young fool, and that's a fact."

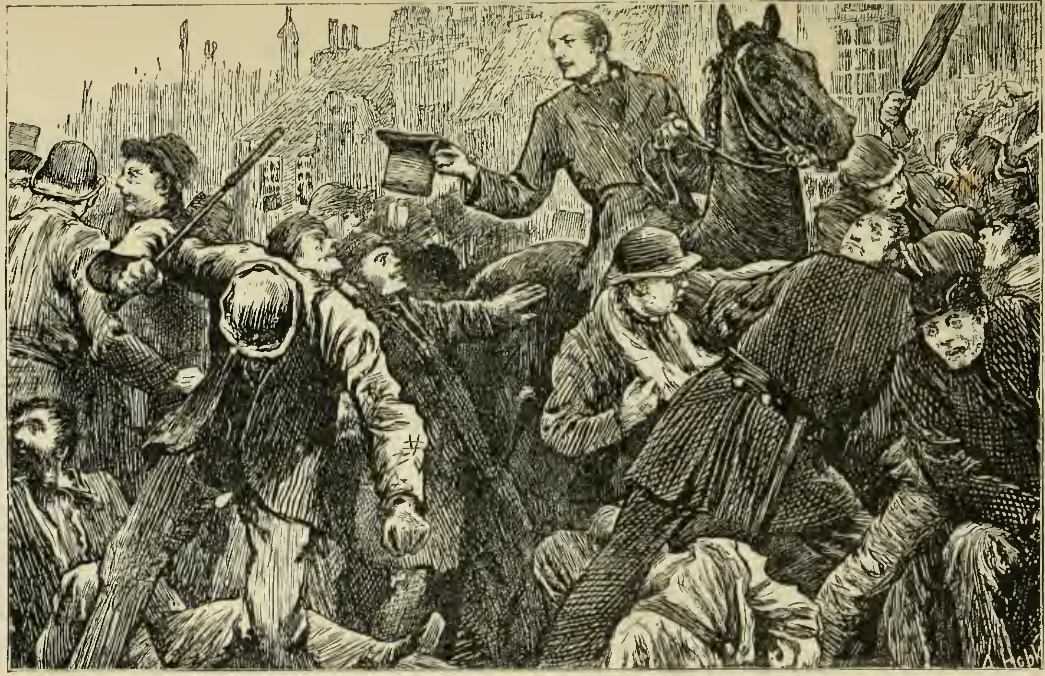
"He was not understood," said Minola, "and he has been treated very badly by the Government."

"Of course he has. I told him they would treat him badly. They wouldn't understand all his concern about black fellows—how could they understand it? Why didn't he let it alone? The fellow who's out there now, you won't find him bothering about such things, you bet—as we say out West, if you will excuse such a rough expression, Miss Grey. But of course Heron has been treated very badly, and we are going to run him for Dukes-Keeton."

Several visitors had now come in, and Mr. Heron contrived to change his position and cross over to the part of the room where Minola was.

"Look here, Heron," Mr. St. Paul said, "you have got a staunch ally here already. Miss Grey means to wear your colours, I dare say—do they wear colours at elections now in England?—I don't know—and you had better canvass her for her influence in Keeton. If I were an elector of Keeton, I'd vote for the Pope or the Sultan if Miss Grey asked me."

Meanwhile, Lady Limpenny was pleading her cause with Mr. Money. It may be said that Lady Limpenny was the wife of a physician who had been knighted, and who had no children. Her husband was wholly absorbed in his professional occupations, and never even thought of going anywhere with his wife, or concerning



"A confused mass of struggling legs and arms."

himself about what she did. He knew the Money women professionally, and except professionally he could not be said to know anybody. Lady Limpenny, therefore, indulged all her whims freely. Her most abiding or most often recurring whim was an anxiety for the salvation of her soul, but she had passionate flirtations meanwhile with china, poetry, flowers, private theatricals, lady-helps, and other pastimes and questions of the hour.

"You'll never part with that china," Mr. Money said; "you know you can't."

"Oh, but my dear Money, you don't understand my feelings. You are not, you know—an old friend may say so—you are not a religious man. You have not been penetrated by what I call religion—not yet, I mean."

"Not yet, certainly. Well, why don't you send to Christie and Manson's at once?"

"But, my dear Money, to part with my china in *that* way, to have it sent all about the world perhaps? Oh, no! I want to part with it to some friend who will let me come and see it now and again."

"Have you thought of this, Lady Limpenny? Suppose, when you have sold it, you go to see it now and then, and covet it—covet your neighbour's goods, perhaps long even to steal it. Where is the spiritual improvement then?"

"Money! You shock me! You horrify me! Could that be possible? Is there such weakness in human nature?"

"Quite possible, I assure you. You have been yourself describing the influence of these unregulated likings. How do you know that they may not get the better of you in another way? Take my advice, and keep your china. It will do you less harm in your own possession than in that of anybody else."

"If I could think so, my dear Money!"

"Think it over, my dear Lady Limpenny; look at it from this point of view, and let me know your decision—then we can talk about it again."

Lady Limpenny relapsed for a while into reflection, with a doubtful and melancholy expression upon her face. Money, however, had gained his point, or, as he would himself have expressed it, "choked her off" for the moment.

"I don't like your new friend," said Minola to Victor.

"My new friend? Who's he?"

"Your friend Mr. St. Paul."

"Oh, he isn't a new friend, or a friend at all. He is rather an old acquaintance, if anything."

"Well, I don't like him."

"Nor I. Don't let yourself be drawn into much talk with him."

"No? Then there *is* somebody you don't like, Mr. Heron. That's a healthy sign. I really thought you liked all men and all women, without exception."

"Well, I am not good at disliking people, but I don't like *him*, and I didn't like to see him talking to you."

"Indeed? Yet he is a political ally of yours and of Mr. Money now."

"That's a different thing; and I don't know anything very bad of him, only I had rather you didn't have too much to say to him. He's a rowdy, that's all. If I had a sister, I shouldn't care to have him for an acquaintance of hers."

"Is it a vice to know him?"

"Almost, for women," Heron said abruptly; and presently, having left Minola, interposed, as if without thinking of it, between Lucy Money and St. Paul, who was engaging her in conversation.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A MIDNIGHT CONFIDENCE.

Mr. St. Paul stayed to dinner that day, being invited by Money without ceremony, and accepting the invitation in the easiest way. Victor Heron declined to remain. The family and Minola, with Mr. St. Paul, made up the party. St. Paul was very attentive to Mrs. Money, who appeared to be delighted with him. He talked all through the dinner—he hardly ever stopped; he had an adventure in Texas, or in Mexico, or in the South Sea Islands, *àpropos* of everything; he seemed equally pleased whether his listeners believed or disbelieved his stories, and he talked of his own affairs with a cool frankness, as if he was satisfied that all the world must know everything about him, and that he might as well speak bluntly out. He could not be called cynical in manner, for cynicism presupposes a sort of affectation, a defiance, or a deliberate *pose* of some kind, and St. Paul seemed absolutely without affectation—completely self-satisfied and easy. Victor had spoken of him as "a rowdy, that's all." But that was not all. He was—if such a phrase could be tolerated—a "gentleman rowdy." His morals and his code of honour seemed to be those of a Mexican horse-stealer, and yet anybody must have known that he was by birth and early education an English gentleman.

"I don't think I know a soul about town," he said. "I looked in at the club once or twice—always kept up my subscription there during my worst of times—and I didn't see a creature I could recollect. I dare say the people who know my brother won't care to know me. I did leave such a deuce of a reputation behind me; and they'll all be sure to think I haven't got a red cent—a penny, I mean. There they are mistaken. Somehow, the money-making gift grows on you out West."

"Why don't you settle down?" Money asked. "Get into Parliament, marry, range yourself, and all that--make up with your brother, and be all right. You have plenty of time before you yet."

"My good fellow, what do you call plenty of time? Look at me—I'm as bald as if I were a judge."

"Oh, bald! that's nothing. Everybody is bald nowadays."

"But I'm thirty-five! Thirty-five—think of that, young ladies! a grizzled, grim old fogey—what is it Thackeray says?—all girls know Thackeray. Who on earth would marry me? My brother and his wife have given me such a shockingly bad character. Some of it I deserved, perhaps; some of it, I didn't. They think I have disgraced the family name, I dare say. What did the family name do for me, I should like to know? Out in Texas we didn't care much about family names."

"I entirely agree with your view of things, Mr. St. Paul," Mrs. Money said, in her soft melancholy tone. "England is destroyed by caste and class. I honour a man of family who has the spirit to put away such ideas."

"Oh, it would be all well enough if one were the eldest brother, and had the money, and all that. I should like to be the Duke, I dare say, well enough. But I can't be that, and I've been very happy hunting buffaloes for months together, and no one but an old Indian to speak to. I don't disgrace the Duke's family name, for I've dropped it, nor any courtesy title, for I don't use any. I believe they have forgotten me altogether in Keeton. Miss Grey tells me so."

"Excuse me," Minola said, "I didn't say that, for I didn't know. I only said I didn't remember hearing of you by your present name; but I didn't know any of the family at the Castle. We belonged to the towns-people, and were not likely to have much acquaintance with the Castle."

"Except at election time—I know," St. Paul said, with a laugh. "Well, I'm worse off now, for they won't know *me* even at election time."

Then the talk went off again under St. Paul's leadership, and almost by his sole effort, to his adventurous life, and he told many stories of fights with Indians, of vigilance committees, of men hanged for horse-stealing, and of broken-down English scamps, who either got killed or made their fortune out West. A cool contempt for human life was made specially evident. "I like a place," the narrator more than once observed, "where you can kill a man if you want to and no bother about it." Perhaps still more evident was the contempt for every principle but that of comradeship.

After dinner Mr. St. Paul only showed himself in the drawing-room for a moment or two, and then took his leave.

"Papa," Lucy said instantly, "do tell us all about Mr. St. Paul."

"Are you curious to know something about him, Miss Grey?" Money asked.

"Well, he certainly seems to be an odd sort of person. He is a little like what I should imagine a pirate of romance."

"Not a bad hit. He is a sort of pirate out of date. But he represents, with a little exaggeration, a certain tendency among younger sons to-day. Some younger sons, you know, are going into trade; some are working at the bar, or becoming professional journalists; some are rearing sheep in Australia, and cattle in Kansas and Texas. It's a phase of civilisation worth observing, Miss Grey, to you who go in for being a sort of little philosopher."

"Dear papa, how can you say so? Nola does not go in for being anything so dry and dreadful."

"The tendencies of an aristocracy must always interest a thoughtful mind like Miss Grey's, Lucy," Mrs. Money said gravely. "There is at least something hopeful in the mingling of classes."

"In young swells becoming drovers and rowdies?" Money observed. "Hum! well, as to that"—— and he stopped.

"I think I am a little interested in him," Minola said; "but only personally, not philosophically."

"Well, that's nearly all about him. He was a scamp, and he knocked about the world, and settled, if that can be called settling, out West for a while; and he has made money, and I hope he has sown his wild oats; and he has come home for variety, and, I think, to annoy his brother. I met him in Egypt, and I knew him in England too; and so he came to see me, and he found a sort of old acquaintance in Heron. That's all. He's a clever fellow, and not a bad fellow in his way. I dare say he would have made a very decent follower of Drake or of Raleigh if he had been born at the right time."

Minola's attention was drawn away somewhat from the character, adventures, and philosophical interest of Mr. St. Paul to observe some peculiarity in the manner of Lucy Money. Although Lucy had set out by declaring herself wildly eager to know something about St. Paul, she very soon dropped out of the conversation, and drew listlessly away. After a while she sat at the piano, and began slowly playing some soft and melancholy chords. Minola had been observing something of a change in Lucy this present visit, something that she had not seen before. Mr. Money presently went to his study; the women all dispersed, and Minola sat in her bedroom, and wondered within herself whether anything was disturbing Lucy's bright little mind.

It was curious to note how Lucy Money's soft ways had won upon Minola. Lucy twined herself round the affections of the stronger girl, and clung to her. Mrs. Money was pleased, amused, and touched by the sight. The calm Theresa was a little annoyed, considering Lucy to show thereby a lack of the composure and dignity befitting a woman; and Mary Blanchet was sometimes disposed to be jealous. Minola herself was filled with affectionate kindness for the overgrown child, not untempered with a dash of pity and wonder. She was sometimes inclined to address the girl in certain lines from Joanna Baillie, forgotten now even of most readers of poetry, and ask her, "Thou sweetest thing that e'er didst fix its lightly-fibred spray on the rude rock, ah! would'st thou cling to *me*?" For whatever the outer world and its lookers-on may have thought of her, it is certain that Minola did still believe herself to be cold, unloving, hard to warm towards her fellow-beings. The unrestrained, unaffected love ot Lucy filled her at once with surprise and a sweeter, softer feeling.

So when she heard the patter of feet at her door she hardly had to wait for the familiar tap and the familiar voice to know that Lucelet was there. Minola opened the door, and Lucelet came in with her hair all loosely around her, and her eyes sparkling.

"May I sit a little and talk?" and, without waiting for an answer, she coiled herself on the hearthrug near the chair on which Minola had been sitting. "You sit there again, Nola. Are you glad to see me?"

"Very, very glad, Lucy dear."

"Do you love me, master?—no?" For Minola had, among other things, been teaching Lucy to read Shakespeare, and Lucy had just become enamoured of Ariel's tender question, and was delighted to turn it to her own account.

"Dearly, my delicate Ariel," said Minola, carrying on the quotation; and Lucy positively crimsoned with a double delight, having her quotation understood and answered, and an assurance of affection given.

"Why don't you let down your hair, Nola? Do let me see it now completely down. I'll do it—allow me." And she sprang up, came behind Minola, and "undid" all her hair, so that it fell around her back and shoulders. Minola could hardly keep from blushing to be thus made a picture of and openly admired. "There, that is perfectly beautiful! You look like Lady Godiva, or like the Fair One with the Golden Locks, if you prefer that. Did you ever read the story of 'The Fair One with the Golden Locks,' when you were a little girl? Oh, please leave your hair just as it is, and let me look at it for a while. Do you remember Lady Limpenny's nonsense to-day?"

Minola allowed her to please herself, and they began to talk; but after the first joy of coming in, Lucy seemed a little *distraite*, and not quite like herself. She fell into little moments of silence every now and then, and sometimes looked up into Minola's face as if she were going to say something, and then stopped.

Minola saw that her friend had something on her mind; but thought it best not to ask her any questions, feeling sure that if Lucy had anything she wished to say, Lucy would not keep it long unsaid.

After a moment's pause, "Nola!"

"Yes, dear."

"You don't much like men in general?"

"Well, Lucy dear, I don't know that anybody much likes men in general, or women either. Good Christians say that they love all their brothers and sisters, but I don't suppose it's with a very ardent love."

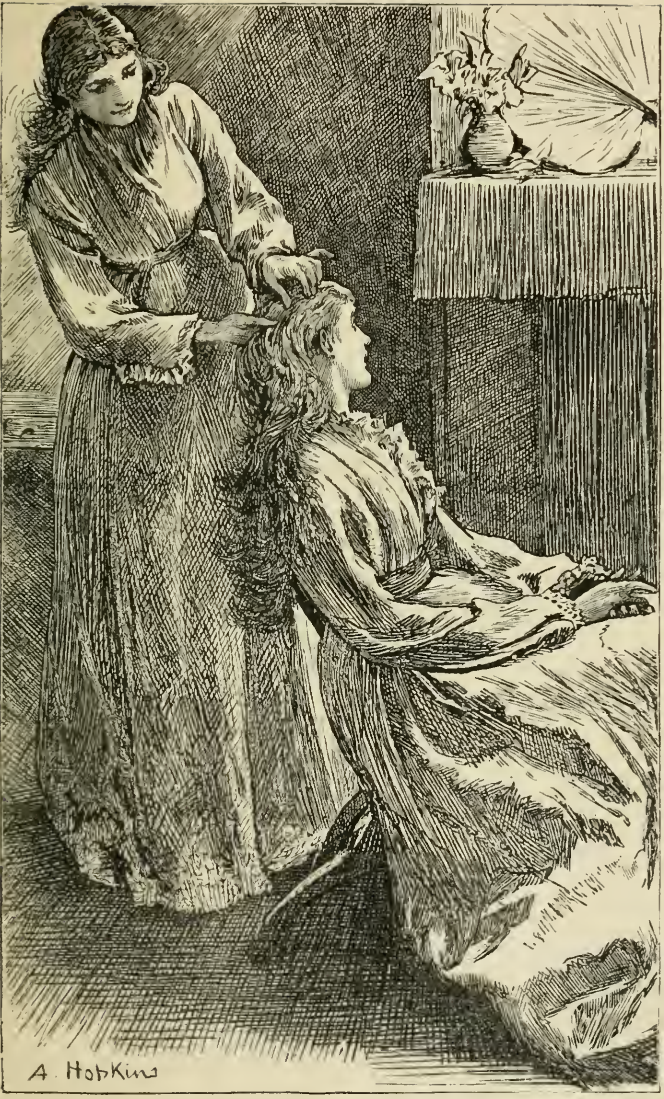
"But you rather go in for not liking men as a rule, don't you?"

Minola was a little amused by the words "go in for not liking men." They seemed to be—what she knew Lucy never meant them for—a sort of rebuke to the affectation which would formally pose itself as misanthropic. Minola had of late begun to entertain doubts as to whether a certain amount of half-conscious egotism and affectation did not mingle in her old-time proclamations of a dislike to men.

"I think I rather did go in for not liking men, Lucy; but I think I am beginning to be a little penitent. Perhaps I was rather general in my ideas; perhaps the men I knew best were not very fair specimens of the human race; perhaps men in general don't very much care what I think of them."

"Any man would care if he knew you, especially if he saw you with your hair down like that. But, anyhow, you don't dislike *all* men?"

"Oh, no, dear. How could I dislike your father, Lucelet?"



*"There, that is perfectly beautiful!"*

"No," Lucy said, looking round with earnest eyes; "who could dislike him, Nola? I am so fond of him; I could say almost anything to him. If you knew what I have lately been talking to him about, you would wonder. Well, but he is not the only man you don't dislike; I am sure you don't dislike Mr. Heron." Her eyes grew more enquiring and eager than before.

"No, indeed, Lucy; I don't think anyone could dislike him, either."

"I am delighted to hear you say so; but I want you to say some more. Tell me what you think of Mr. Heron; I am curious to know. You are so much more clever than I, and you can understand people and see into them. Tell me exactly what you see in Mr. Heron."

"Why do you want to know all this, Lucy?"

"Because I want to hear your opinion very particularly, for you are not a hero-worshipper, and you don't admire men in general. Some girls are such enthusiastic fools that they make a hero out of every good-looking young man they meet. But you are not like that, Nola."

"Oh, no! I am not like that," Nola echoed, not without a thought that now, perhaps, there were moments when she almost wished she were.

"Well, then, tell me. First, do you think Mr. Heron handsome?"

"Yes, Lucy; I think he is handsome"

"Then, do you like him? Do tell me what you think of him."

"In the name of heaven," Minola asked herself, "why should I not speak the truth in answer to so plain and innocent a question?" She answered quietly, and looking straight forward at the fire,

"I like Mr. Heron very much, Lucy. I don't know many men—young men especially.—but I like him better than any young man I have met as yet."

"As yet! Yes, yes; I am glad to hear you say that," Lucy said, with beaming eyes, and growing good-humouredly saucy in her very delight. "As yet! Yes, you put that in well, Nola."

"How so, dear?"

"Oh, you know. Because of the one yet to present himself; the not impossible He—nearly impossible, though—who is to be fit for my Nola. I tell you I shall scrutinise him before I allow his pretensions to pass. Well, now, about Mr. Heron?"

"I think him a very brave, generous, and noble-hearted young man. I think he has not a selfish thought or a mean purpose about him, and I think he has spirit and talent; and I hope one day to hear that he has made himself an honourable name."

Lucy turned now to Minola a pair of eyes that were moist with tears.

"Tell me, Nola,"—and her voice grew a little tremulous—"don't you think he is a man a woman might fall in love with?"

There was a moment's silence, and Lucy leaned upon Nola's knees, eagerly looking into her face. Then Nola answered, in a quiet, measured undertone,

"Oh, yes, Lucy; I do indeed. I think he is a man a woman might fall in love with."

"Thank you, Nola; that is all I wanted to ask you."

There was another pause.

"Nola!"

"Yes, Lucy."

"You don't ask me anything."

"Perhaps, dear, because there is nothing I want to know."

"Then you *do* guess?"

"Oh, yes, dear, I do guess."

"Well—but what?"

"I suppose—that you are—engaged to Mr. Heron."

Lucy started up with her face all on fire.

"Oh, no, Nola, dear darling! you have guessed too much. I wish I had told you, and not asked you to guess at all. We're not engaged. Oh, no. It's only—well, it's only—it's only that I am in love with him, Nola. Oh, yes, so much in love with him that I should not like to live if he didn't care about me—no, not one day!" Then Lucy hid her head in Minola's lap and sobbed like a little child.

Perhaps the breakdown was of service to both the girls. It allowed poor Lucy to relieve her long pent-up feelings, and it gave Minola time to consider the meaning of the revelation as composedly as she could, and to think of what she ought to say and do.

Lucy presently looked up with a gleam of April brightness in her eyes.

"Do you think me foolish, Nola, for telling you this?"

"Well, dear, I don't know whether you ought to have told it to me."

"I couldn't do without telling it to somebody, Nola. I think I must be like that king I read about somewhere—I forget his name; no, I believe it was not the king, but his servant—who had to tell the secret to some listener, and so told it to the reeds on the sea-shore. If I had not told this to somebody, I must have told it to the reeds."

Minola almost wished she had told it to the reeds. There were reeds enough beneath the little bridge which Nola loved in

Regent's Park, and had they been possessed of the secret, she might have looked over the bridge for ever, and dreamed dreams as the lazy water flowed on beneath, and even noted and admired the whispering reeds, and they would never have whispered that secret to her.

"I think papa guesses it," Lucy said. "I am sure he does, because he talked to me of—oh, well, of a different person, and asked me if I cared about him, and I told him that I didn't. He said he was glad, for he didn't much like him; but that I should marry anyone I liked—always provided, Nola, that he happened to like me, which doesn't at all follow. I know papa likes Mr. Heron."

"Then, Lucy, would it not be better to tell Mr. Money?"

"Oh, Nola! I couldn't tell him that—I could tell him almost anything, but I couldn't tell him that. Are you not sorry for me, Nola? Oh, say you are sorry for me! The other day—it only seems the other day—I was just as happy as a bird. Do say you are sorry for me."

"But, my dear, I don't know why there should be any sorrow about it. Why should not everything prove to be perfectly happy?"

"Do you think so, Nola?"

She looked up to Nola with an expression of childlike anxiety.

"Why should it not be so, Lucy? If I were a man, I should be very much in love with you, dear. You are the girl that men ought to be in love with."

There was a certain tone of coldness or constraint in Minola's voice which could not escape even Lucy's observation.

"You think me weak and foolish, I know very well, Nola, because I have made such a confession as this. For all your kindness and your good heart, I know that you despise any girl who allows herself to fall in love with a man. You don't care about men, and you think we ought to have more dignity, and not to prostrate ourselves before them; and you are quite right. Only some of us can't help it."

"No," said Minola sadly; "I suppose not."

"There! You look all manner of contempt at me. I should like to have you painted as the Queen of the Amazons—you would look splendid. But I may trust to your friendly heart and your sympathy all the same, I know. You will pity us weaker girls, and you won't be too hard on us. I want you to help me."

"Can I help you, Lucy? Shall I ask Mr. Heron if he is in love with you? I will, if you like."

"Oh, Nola, what nonsense! That only shows how ridiculous you think me. No, I only mean that you should give me your sympathy, and let me talk to you. And—you observe things so well—just to use your eyes for my sake. Oh, there is so much a friend may do! And he thinks so much of you, and always talks to you so freely."

Yes, Minola thought to herself; he always talks to me very freely—we are good friends. If he were in love with Lucy, I dare say he would tell me. Why should he not? She tells me that she is in love with him—that is a proof of her friendship.

We can think in irony as well as speak in it, and Minola was disposed at present to be a little sarcastic. She did not love such disclosures as Lucy had been making. There seemed to be a lack of that instinctive delicacy in them, which, as she fancied, might be the possession of a girl were she brought up naked in a South-Sea islet. Fresh and innocent as Lucy was, yet this revelation seemed wanting in pure self-respect. Perhaps, too, it was in keeping with Minola's old creed to believe that this was just the sort of girl whom most men would be sure to love. At any rate, she was for the moment in a somewhat bitter mood. Something of this must have shown itself in her expression, for Lucy said, in a tone of frightened remonstrance,

"Now, Nola, I have told you all. I have betrayed myself to you, and if you only despise me and feel angry with me, oh, what shall I do? Isn't it strange—you both came the same day here—you and he, for the first time—I mean the first time since I saw you at school. Am I to lose you too?"

There was something so simple and helpless in this piteous appeal, with its implied dread of a love proving hopeless, that no irony or anger could have prevailed against it in Minola's breast. She threw her arm round the child's neck, and petted and soothed her.

"Why should you lose both—why should you lose either?" Minola said. "I can promise you for one, Lucy dear; and if I could promise you for the other too, you might be sure of him. He must be a very insensible person, Lucy, who fails to appreciate you. Only don't make it too plain, dear, to anyone but me. They say that men like to do the love-making for themselves—and you have not the slightest need to go out of your way. Tell me—does he know anything of this?"

"Oh, no, Nola."

"Nor guess anything at all?"

"Oh, no,—I am sure not—I don't think so. You didn't guess anything—now, did you?—and how could he?"

Minola felt a little glad to hear of this—for the dignity of womanhood, she said to herself. But she did not know how long it would last, for Lucy was not a person likely to accomplish great efforts of self-control for the mere sake of the abstract dignity of womanhood. For the moment, all Minola could do was to express full sympathy with her friend, and at the same time to counsel her gently not to betray her secret. Lucy went to her bedroom at last, much fluttering and quivering, but also relieved and encouraged, and she fell asleep, for all her love-pains, long before Minola did.

"She will be very happy," Minola sat thinking, when she was alone. "She has a great deal already. A loving father and mother and sister; a happy home, where she is sheltered against every thing; a future all full of brightness. He will love her—I suppose. She's very pretty, and sweet, and clinging; and he is simple and manly, and would be drawn by her pure, winning ways; and men like him are fond of women who don't profess to be strong. Well, if I can help her, I will do so—it will be something to see her completely happy, and him too."

Whereupon, for no apparent reason, the tears sprang into Minola's eyes, and she found a vain wish arising in her heart that she had never renewed her acquaintance with Lucy Money, never been persuaded by Mary Blanchet to visit her, never stood upon her threshold and met Victor Heron there.

"Why not wish at once that I had never been born?" she said, half tearful, half scornful of her tears. "One thing is as easy now as the other, and as useful, and not to have been born would have saved many idle hours and much heartache."

## CHAPTER XV.

### A MORNING CONFIDENCE.

Minola rose next morning with a bewildering and oppressed sense of disappointment and defeat. The whole of her scheme of life had given way. Her little bubble-world had burst. All her plans of bold independence and of contented life, of isolation from social trammels, and freedom from woman's weaknesses, had broken down. She had always thought scorn of those who said that women could not feel friendship for men without danger of feeling love—and now, what was she but a cruel mocking evidence of the folly of her confidence? Alas, no romantic school-girl could have fallen more suddenly into love than Minola had done. There was but one man whom she had ever seen with whom she had coveted a friendship, and she now knew, only too well, that in her breast the friendship had already caught fire, and blazed into love. Where was Alceste now, and the Alceste standard by which she had proposed to test all men and women, well convinced beforehand that she would find them wanting? She could not even flatter herself that she had been faithful to her faith, and that if she had succumbed at the very outset it was because the first-comer actually proved to be an Alceste. No, she could not cram this complacent conviction into her mind. Victor Heron was a generous and noble-hearted young man, she felt assured; but she had not fallen in love with him because of any assurance that he was like the hero of her girlhood. She made no attempt to deceive herself in this way. In her proud resentment of her weakness she even trampled upon it with undeserved scorn. "I fell in love with him," she said to herself, "just as the silliest girl falls in love—because he was there, and I couldn't help it."

It was not merely Lucy's revelation which had forced upon Minola a knowledge of her own feelings. This had perhaps so sent conviction home as to render illusion or self-deception impossible any longer, but it was not that which first told her of her weakness. That had long been more and more making itself known to her. It was plain to her now that since the first day when she stood upon the bridge with him in the park, and looked into the canal, she had loved him. "Oh, why did I not know it then?" she asked, wearily, of herself. "I could have avoided him—have never seen him again—and it might so have come to nothing, and at least we should not have to meet."

Amid all her pain of the night and the morning, one question was ever repeating itself, "Will this last?" That the fever which burned her was love—genuine love—the regular old love of the romances and the poets—she could not doubt. She knew it because it was so new a feeling. Had she walked among a fever-stricken population, refusing to believe in the danger of infection, and satisfied that the fearless and the wise were safe, and had she suddenly felt the strange pains and unfamiliar heats, and found the senses beginning to wander, she would have known that this was fever. The pangs of death are new to all alike when they come, but those who are about to die are conscious—even in their last moments of consciousness—that this new summons has the one awful meaning. So did Minola know only too well what the meaning was of this new pain. "Will it last?" was her cry to herself. "Shall I have to go through life with this torture always to bear? Is it true that women have to bear this for years and years—that some of them never get over it?"

"Oh, I shall never get over it—never, never!" she cried out in bitterness. She was very bitter now against herself and fate. She did not feel that it is better to love vainly than not at all. Indeed, such consoling conviction belongs to the poet who philosophises on love, or to the disappointed lover who is already beginning to be consoled. It does not do much good to anyone in the actual hour of pain. Minola cordially and passionately wished that she had not loved, or seen anyone whom she could love. She was full of wrath and scorn for herself, and believed herself humbled and shamed. Her whole life was crossed; her quiet was all gone; she was now doomed to an existence of perpetual self-constraint and renunciation, and even deception. She had a secret which she must conceal from the world as if it was a murder. She must watch her words, her movements, her very glances, lest any sudden utterance, or gesture, or blush, should betray her. She would wake in the night in terror, lest in some dream she might have called out some word or name which had roused Mary Blanchet in the next room, and betrayed her. She must meet Victor Heron, Heaven knows how often, and talk with him as a friend, and never let one gleam of the truth appear. She must hear Lucy Money tell of her love, and be the confidante of her childlike emotions. Not often, perhaps, has a proud and sensitive girl been tried so strangely. "I thought I hated men before," she kept saying to herself. "I *do* hate them now; and women and all. I hate him most of all, because I know that I so love him."

All this poor Minola kept saying or thinking to herself that morning as she listlessly dressed. It is not too much to say that the very air seemed changed for her. She had only one resolve to sustain her, but that was at least as strong as her love, or as death—the resolve that, come what would, she must keep her secret. Victor Heron believed himself her friend, and desired to be nothing more. No human soul but her own must know that her feeling to him was not the same. She would have known the need of that resolve even if she had never been entrusted with poor dear little Lucy's secret. But the more calmly she thought over that little story, the more she thought it likely that Lucy's dream might come to be fulfilled.

The world—that is to say, the breakfast-room and the Money family—had to be faced. The family were as pleasant as ever, except Lucy, who was pale and seemed troubled, and at whom her father looked once or twice keenly, but without making any remark.

"I have had a letter from Lady Limpenny already this morning," Mr. Money observed.

All professed an interest in the contents of the letter, even Theresa.

Mr. Money began to read:

"Thank you a thousand times, my dear Money"——

"We are very friendly, you see, Miss Grey," he said, breaking off. "But it's not any peculiar friendship for me. She always calls men by their names after the first interview."

"She generally addresses papa as 'my dear,' without any proper name appended," said Lucy, who did not much like Lady Limpenny. "She always likes the men of a family, and always hates the women."

"Lucy, my dear," her mother pleaded, "how can you say so! Laura Limpenny and I are true friends."

"She is giving us good help with our schools and our church," Theresa Money said; "and Reginald" (Theresa's engaged lover) "thinks very highly of her."

"She always praises men, and they all think highly of her," Lucy persisted; "and it is something to be Lady Anything."

"I assure you, Miss Grey," Mrs. Money said, "that Lady Limpenny is the most sincere and unpretending creature. She is not an aristocrat—she has nothing to do with aristocracy; if she had, there could be little sympathy, as you may well believe, between her and me, for you know my convictions. The aristocracy of this country are its ruin! When England falls—and the hour of her fall is near—it will not be due to beings like Laura Limpenny."

"There I agree with you, dear," Mr. Money gravely said. "Shall I go on?"

He went on.

"Thank you a thousand times, my dear Money, for your wise and Christianlike advice. I will keep my china. I am convinced now that my ideas of yesterday were wrong, and even sinful. I had a charming talk with a dear æsthetic man last evening, after I saw you, and he assures me that my china is a collection absolutely unique; and that, if I were to part with it, Mrs. De Vallancey would manage, at any cost, or by any contrivance, to get hold of it; and your darling wife knows how I hate Mrs. De Vallancey. I now feel that it is my duty to keep the china, and that a love for the treasures of art is in itself an act of homage to the Great Creator of all.

"My sweetest love to your darling wife and angel-girls. Kind regards to the young lady with the hair; and when you see our dear friend Heron, do tell him that I expect him to call on me *very soon.*

"Ever yours,
"LAURA LIMPENNY."

"'Our dear friend Heron!'" exclaimed Lucy, in surprise and anger. "Does she know Mr. Heron so well as that?"

"She met him here, yesterday, for the first time," Mr. Money said; "but that's quite enough for Lady Limpenny. She has taken a violent liking to him already, and enrols him among her dear friends. Seriously, she would be rather a useful person for Heron to know. She knows everyone, and will do anything. Her husband attends all the old women of quality, and a good many of the young women too. I shouldn't be surprised if Sir James Limpenny—or his wife—could get Heron a hearing from some great personage."

"I am sure he won't do that," said Lucy warmly. "I don't believe Mr. Heron would condescend to be helped on in that sort of way."

"Why not?" Minola asked. "I think Lady Limpenny is a more creditable ally than a person like Mr. St. Paul. If a man wants to succeed in life, I suppose he must try all the usual arts."

"I didn't think you would have said that of Mr. Heron, Nola," said Lucy, hurt and wondering.

Nola did not think she would have said it herself twelve hours ago. Why she said it now she could not tell. Perhaps she was womanish enough to feel annoyed at the manner in which Lucy seemed to appropriate Victor Heron's cause, and womanish enough, too, to relieve her mind by saying disparaging things of him.

Mr. Money's eyes twinkled with an amused smile.

"See how you wrong a man sometimes, you ladies—even the most reasonable among you. Heron is more Quixotic than you think, Miss Grey. I have had a letter from him this very morning about St. Paul. I'll read it if you like—it need not be kept secret from anybody here."

Mrs. Money and Lucy earnestly asked to have the letter read, and Mr. Money read it accordingly:—

"My dear Money,—I don't like St. Paul, and I won't march through Coventry with him. I think he is unprincipled and discreditable, and if I can't get in for Keeton without his helping-hand, I'll stay out of Keeton, and that's all about *that.* I know you will agree with me when you think this over. Excuse haste and abruptness. I want to make my position clear to you withou any loss of time,

"Yours faithfully,
"VICTOR HERON."

"Now, Nola, you see you were wrong," the triumphant Lucy exclaimed.

"I do not like Mr. St. Paul," the quiet Theresa observed. "He seems to me godless and demoralised. He spoke in the lightest and most scoffing way of the labours of the Church among the heathen populations."

"I liked him," Mrs. Money sighed. "I liked him because he had the spirit to resign his rank and fling away his title."

"I think his rank rather resigned him," Mr. Money observed. "Anyhow, one must in the ordinary world consent to take up with a scamp now and then. Heron says he won't have anything to do with St. Paul, and Lucy undertakes to say for him that he won't be patronised by Lady Limpenny. I ask you all calmly, as civilised and Christian beings, how is a young fellow to get on in London who won't consent to be helped by scamps and old women?"

"Mr. Heron represents a political cause," the eager Lucy began.

Her father looked quietly round at her.

"Why, Lucelet, my dear, when did you come to know anything about political causes, or to care about them? I thought you only cared for the renascence of art—isn't it renascence you call it? I understood that politics were entirely beneath the notice of all your school. Pray tell me, Mistress Politician, to which side of politics your father belongs?"

"Oh, papa, for shame! What nonsense! As if I didn't know. Of course you are a Liberal—an advanced Liberal."

"Good; and our friend Heron?"

"An advanced Liberal too. Of course I know that you are on his side."

"That I am on his side? That he is on my side wouldn't do, I suppose, although I am somewhat the elder, and am in Parliament while he is not, and is not particularly likely to be if he continues to be so squeamish. What are the political views of our young friend the artist, the poet, the bard, or whatever you please to call him?"

"Mr. Blanchet?"—Lucy slightly coloured.

"Mr. Blanchet, yes. Am I on his side?"

"Oh, he has no side. He knows nothing of politics," Lucy said, contemptuously.

"Stupid of him, isn't it?"

"Very stupid. At least, I suppose so: I don't know. Oh, yes; I think every man ought to understand politics."

Mr. Money smiled, and let the subject drop.

When breakfast was over, Mr. Money suddenly said,

"Miss Grey, you always profess to know something about politics. Anyhow, you know something about Keeton folks, and you can give me some useful hints about their ways with which I can instruct our dear friend Heron, as Lady Limpenny calls him. Would you mind coming to my study for a quarter of an hour, away from all this womankind, and answering me a few questions?"

Minola was a little surprised, but showed no surprise, and only said that she would be delighted, of course. Mr. Money offered her his arm with a somewhat old-fashioned courtesy which contrasted not unbecomingly with his usual cheery bluntness of manner to women and men alike.

"Not many ladies come here, Miss Grey," Money said, offeringher a chair when they were in the study. "Lucelet looks in very often, to be sure, but only as a messenger; she doesn't come into council."

"Do I come into council?" Minola asked, with a smile and a little of heightened colour. "I shall feel myself of great importance."

"Well, yes, into council. First about yourself. I have been looking into your affairs a little, Miss Grey—don't be angry; we are all fond of you in this house, and you don't seem to have anyone in particular to look after your interests."

"It was very kind and good of you. I have not many friends, Mr. Money; but I am afraid the word 'interests' is rather too large for any affairs of mine. Have I any interests? Mary Blanchet understands all my affairs much better than I do."

"Yes, they may be called interests, I think. You know that anybody who likes can find out everything about people's wills, and all that. Do you know anything about your father's will?"

"No," Minola said, with a start, and feeling the tears coming to her eyes. "I don't, Mr. Money. At least, not much. I know that he left me some money—so much every year; not much—it would not be much for Lucy—but enough for me and Mary Blanchet. Mary Blanchet manages it for me, and makes it go twice as far as I could. We never spend it all—I mean, we haven't spent it all this year. I should never be able to manage or to get on at all only for her."

Minola spoke with eagerness now, for she was afraid that she was about to receive some of the advice which worldly people call wise, and to be admonished of the improvidence of sharing her little purse with Mary Blanchet.

"And, indeed, I ought to do something for her—something particular," she hastened to add, for she was seized with a sudden fear that Mr. Money might have heard somewhere of her resolve to have Mr. Blanchet's poems printed at her own expense, and might proceed to remonstrate with her.

Mr. Money smiled, seeing completely through her, and only thinking to himself that she was a remarkably good girl, and that he much wished he had a son to marry her.

"Do you know what I was thinking of?" he asked bluntly.

"I am sure you were thinking about me, for you laughed—at my ignorance of business ways, I suppose?"

"Not at all; I was thinking that I should like to have a son, and that I should like you to marry him."

Minola laughed and coloured, but took his words as they were meant, in all good humour and kindness.

"If you had a son, Mr. Money, I am sure I would marry him if you asked me, and he"——

"Thank you. Well, I am only sorry I can't take you at your word. But that wasn't exactly what I brought you here to tell you. What I want to tell you is this. You are likely to have a good deal of property of one kind and another, Miss Grey. Your father, I find, made a good deal of money in his time, and saved it; bought houses and built houses; bought up annuities, insurances, shares in companies—all manner of things. He only left his property to his present wife for her use of what it brings every year during her life. At her death it all comes to you, and I'm told she can't live long."

"Oh, but she may. I hope and pray that she may," Minola exclaimed. "It seems shocking to watch for a woman's death, especially when we were not very friendly to each other. I don't want the money; I have enough, quite enough. I shouldn't know what to do with it. I don't care much about new dresses, and bonnets, and the fashions, and all that; and what could I do with money, living alone in my quiet way? I think a girl of my age, living all to herself, and having much money, would be perfectly ridiculous. Why could not her husband get it, if the poor creature dies? That would be only right. I am sure he may have it for me."

"He mayn't have it for me, though," Mr. Money said. "You have no one, it seems to me, to look after your interests, and I'll take the liberty to do so, for lack of a better, whether you like it or not. However, we can talk about that when the time comes."

Minola gave a sort of shudder.

"When the time comes! That seems so dreadful; as if we were only waiting for the poor woman to be dead to snatch at whatever she left behind her. Mr. Money, is there really no other way?—must I have this property?"

"If she dies before you, yes—it will come to you. Of course you know that it isn't great wealth in the London sense. It won't constitute you an heiress in the Berkeley Square sense, but it will give you a good deal of miscellaneous property for a young woman. Well, as to that, I'll see that you get your rights; and the only thing I have to ask is just that you will not do anything decided, or anything at all, in this business without consulting me."

"Oh, indeed, I can faithfully promise you that. I have no other friend whom I could possibly consult, or who would take any interest in me."

"Come, now, I can't believe that. If you wish, you can be like the young lady in Sheridan's song—friends in all the aged you'll meet, and lovers in the young."

"I don't want to be like her in that."

"In having friends in all the aged?"

"Oh, I don't know; in anything. I am well content with the friends I have."

"Well, some of them, at least, are well content with you. Now, Miss Grey, I want to speak to you of something that concerns me. You and my daughter Lucy are great friends?"

Minola almost started.

"I am very fond of Lucy."

"And she is very fond of you. We all are, for that matter. Did you ever hear of an old Scottish saying about a person having a face like a fiddle—not in shape, you know, but in power of attracting people, and rousing sympathy?"

"Yes. I think I remember it in some of Scott's novels."

"Very well. I think you have a face like a fiddle; all our sympathies are drawn to you. Now, that is why I speak to you of something which I wouldn't talk about to any other woman of your age—not even to my own daughter Theresa, an excellent creature, but not over sympathetic. I am very fond of my Lucelet. She isn't strong; she hasn't great intelligence. I know my little goose is not a swan, but she is very sweet, and sensitive, and loving; the most affectionate little creature that ever was made happy or unhappy by a man. I am morbidly anxious about her happiness. Now, you are her friend, and a thousand times cleverer and stronger than she, and she looks up to you. She would tell you anything. *Has* she told you anything lately?"

Minola hesitated.

"Oh, you needn't hesitate, or think of any breach of confidence.

You may tell me. I could get it all from herself in a moment. It isn't about that I want to ask you. Well, I'll save you all trouble. She has told you something."

"She has."

"She is in love!"

Minola assented.

Mr. Money ran his hand through his hair, got up, and walked a turn or two up and down the study.

"The other day she was a child, and cared for nobody in the world but her mother and me. Now a young fellow comes along, and, like the Earl of Lowgave's lassie in the old song, she does not love her mammy nor she does not love her daddy."

"Oh, but I don't think that at all," Miss Grey said earnestly. "No girl could be fonder of her father and mother."

Mr. Money smiled good-humouredly, but with a look of pity, as one who corrects an odd mistake.

"I know that very well, Miss Grey, and I was not speaking seriously, or grumbling at my little lassie. But it does astonish us elderly parents, when we find out all of a sudden that there are other persons more important than we in the eyes of our little maidens, and we may as well relieve our minds by putting the feeling into words. Well, you know the hero of this little romance?"

Minola was looking steadily at the fire, and away from Mr. Money. She did not answer at once, and there was a pause. The suddenness of the silence aroused her.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Money. I know who he is," she said, without looking round.

"Very well. Now comes the delicate part of my questioning. Of course you can't be expected to read the secrets of other people's hearts, and I suppose you are not in *his* confidence."

"No, indeed," she said very quietly.

"No—you couldn't tell how he feels towards my Lucelet?"

Minola shook her head.

"If I were a man, I am sure I should be in love with her," she said.

"You think so? Yes, perhaps so; but in this case, somehow—— Well, Miss Grey, another question, and then I'll release you: and speak to me frankly, like a true girl to a plain man, who treats her as such. Is there any woman, as far as you know, who is more to him than Lucelet?"

Mr. Money had now come near to where Minola was sitting. He stood leaning against the chimney-piece, and looking fixedly into her face. At first she did not even understand the meaning of his question. Then suddenly she felt that her cheeks began to burn and her heart to beat. She looked up in wonder and pain, but she saw so much of earnestness and anxiety in Mr. Money's face that it would have been impossible not to understand and respect his purpose. In his anxiety for his daughter's happiness his whole soul was absorbed. Minola's heart forgot its own pain for the moment. Her own memory of a father was not of one thus unselfishly absorbed. She answered without hesitation and with quiet self-possession,

"Oh, no, Mr. Money. I know of no such woman. So far as I can guess, none such exists."

Mr. Money drew a deep breath, and his eyes brightened.

"Miss Grey," he said, "I think any other woman in the world would have told me she wasn't in Mr.——, in *his*, secrets, or given me some evasive or petulant answer. I thank you a thousand times. We may then—I may—pursue without compunction my match-making schemes. They are not very selfish; they are only for Lucelet's happiness. I would ask one of my office clerks to marry her if she loved him and he was likely to make her happy; and I would set them up in life. You may guess, then, whether this idea pleases me. But I confess I didn't think—well, of course, your assurance is enough, but I began to think of something different."

Minola rose to go away.

"One word, Miss Grey. Pray don't say anything to my wife about this. She is the truest and kindest of women, as you know, but she can't understand keeping anything a secret, and she always begs of us to leave her out of the smallest plot of the most innocent kind, because she must let it all out prematurely. Now I'll release you, and you have, at all events, one friend in life to be going on with—friend among the aged I mean: the rest will come fast enough."

With a bewildered head and a bursting heart, Minola found her way to her own room.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CHASTELARD.

"So you are really going to be an heiress, my dearest?" Mary Blanchet said to Minola, when our heroine was settled at home again. "I knew you ought to be, and would be if right were done; but right so often isn't done. My brother will be so glad to hear it!—but not as other people might be glad, you know." For Mary began to be afraid that by a hasty word she might be filling the heart of her friend with suspicion of her brother.

"I don't know, Mary. Mr. Money, and others I suppose, say so. I wish it were not true; I am all right as things are, and I hate the idea of gaining by this poor woman's death. I think I should not feel so if we had been friends, and if I could think that it was like a kindly gift from her, and that she wished me to have it. But it is all so different. And then, what do I want of it?"

"One can do so much good with money," said little Mary, sighing. She was thinking of her brother.

"Yes, that is true," Minola said, thinking of Mary herself and of what she might perhaps do for her. "But don't tell anyone about this, Mary—not even your brother—if you can well help it," Minola added, knowing what little chance there would be of Mary's keeping such a thing secret from her brother. "It is all uncertain and only talk as yet, you know."

"These things are never secret, dearest," Mary said, with a wise shake of the head. "Men always get to know of them. I think the birds of the air carry the news abroad that a woman has money, or that she has not;" and Mary sighed again gently.

"Do you see much of an alteration in the ways of men towards me already, Mary? Do they hang around me in adoring groups? Do they lean enraptured over me as I sweep the chords of the harp? Do they who whispered that I sang like the crow before, now loudly declare that my voice puts the nightingale out of conceit with his own minstrelsy?"

"Now you are only talking nonsense, dear; for we know so few men—and then you don't play the harp, and you never sing in company. But, if you ask me, I think I do see some difference."

"Already, Mary?"

"Well, yes, I think so; in one instance at least. Not, surely, that you were not likely to have attentions enough paid to you in any case, if you cared about them or encouraged them, and that, even if you hadn't a sixpence in the world—but still"——

"But still it does enhance one's charms, you think? Come, Mary, tell me the name of this mercenary admirer. Depend upon it, all his arts shall fail."

"You are only laughing at me still, dearest; but there is something in it, I can tell you, for all that. It is not my idea alone, I can assure you. What do you think of a duke's brother for an admirer, Minola?"

Little Mary Blanchet was a crafty little personage. She thought she could not too soon begin working for her brother's cause by trying to throw discredit on the motives of all other possible wooers. She had observed when going now and then to the house of the Moneys, during the last few days, that the returned cadet of the one great ducal house whereof she had any knowledge was there every day, and that he was very attentive to Minola. The same remark had been made by Mrs. Money, and had called forth an indignant objection from Lucy, who protested against the thought of her Nola having a broken-down outcast like that for a lover. But Mary, who was almost terrified at the idea of sitting down in the same room with any member of the great family who owned the mausoleum at Keeton, was not certain how far the name of a family like that might not go with any girl, even Minola, and believed it not an unwise precaution to begin as soon as possible throwing discredit on his purposes.

Minola tried not to seem vexed. She had liked to talk to Mr. St. Paul when he came, as he did every day of her stay in Victoria Street. She had liked it because it gave her no trouble in thinking, and it saved her from having to talk to others with whom she might have felt more embarrassed, and because it turned away attention from what might perhaps have otherwise been observed —as she feared, at least—by too keen eyes. If Mary must suspect anything, it was a relief to find that she only suspected this, and Minola tried to make merry with her about her absurdity. But in her secret heart she sickened at such talk, and such thoughts, and felt as if the very shadow of the fortune which was expected for her, falling already on her path, was making it one of new pain and of still less accustomed shame.

"Poverty parts good company, used to be said," Minola thought; "a little money seems much more likely to part good company in my case."

Yet that there are advantages in a command of money was soon made very clear to Minola. When she returned from a walk a day or two after, she found a specimen copy of Herbert Blanchet's poems awaiting her, with a letter from Victor Heron. The letter was somewhat awkward and rueful. Mr. Heron explained that, by her express instructions, he had allowed Blanchet to have it all his own way in the arrangement of the style of his appearance in paper and print; and that the cost had become something far greater than he had anticipated.

"You should never have been troubled about this," Victor went on to say, "but that you made me promise that you alone should pay for this thing; I wish I hadn't made any such promise, or consented that Blanchet should have his way in the business. To think of a grown man, who has seen the world, leaving a matter of money and business in the hands of a girl and a poet! Blanchet has been going it."

Minola in all her trouble found room for wonder, delight, and something like alarm in looking at the superb edition in which the poems of Mr. Blanchet were to go before a world scarcely prepared for so much artistic gorgeousness. All that vellum paper, rare typography, costly and fantastic binding, and lavish illustration could do for poetry had been done, without stint, on behalf of Herbert Blanchet. The leaves were as thick as parchment and as soft as satin. Only a very few lines of verse appeared on each broad luxurious page. Every initial letter of a sentence was a fantastic design. The whole school of Blanchet's artistic friends had rushed into combination to enrich the pages, the margins, and the covers, with fanciful illustration. If they only had been great or even successful and popular artists, the book might have been worth its weight in gold. Unfortunately, Mr. Blanchet's artistic friends were not yet great or famous. The outer world—that world, which, in the opinion of the school, was wholly composed of dullards and Philistines—knew as yet nothing about these artists, and neither blamed them nor praised them. The volume was as large in its superficial extent as an ordinary atlas, and some of the poems which occupied a whole page were not more than four lines in length. The whole thing seemed truly, in the words of a poet whom Mr. Blanchet especially despised, "all a wonder and a wild desire."

Thinking of herself as the patroness and in some sort the parent of such a volume, Minola felt some such mixture of pride and timidity as a modest girl might own who has suddenly been made a princess, and is not quite certain whether she will be able to support her position with becoming nerve and dignity.

There came a little letter, too, from the poet himself. It ran in this fashion:—

> Dear Patroness and Queen,—The Poet has not dared to send in unfitting casket the offering which your approval has made precious. The poems which are addressed to you must at least offer themselves in form not unworthy to be touched by your hand.
>
> In all devotion yours,
> HERBERT BLANCHET.

Nor did the volume want a poetical dedication. The second leaf contained the following:—

UNTO MY LADY PATRONESS AND QUEEN.

Upon my darkness may there well befall
Light of all darkness, darkness of all light;
Starfire of amber, dew of deathlike sheen;
Waters that burn, pale fires that sicken all,
And shadows all aglow with saffron light;
But comes my lady, who is Glory's queen,
And all the bright is dark, and pallid dark the bright.

Minola read this dedication again and again, puzzled, amused, angry, hardly knowing whether to laugh or to cry. "Am I Glory's queen?" she asked of her own soul. "And if I am, am I letting light or darkness in upon my poor poet? Am I depriving him of the amber, the dew, and the saffron light, or not? Is it praise or blame, this dedication? I suppose it must be praise, but I don't think anybody could tell from its words. Oh, my dear little Mary Blanchet, why must you have a brother?—and why must that brother be a poet?"

There was one consolation the dedication did not set forth her name, and nobody could know who the lady patroness of the poet might be. Minola felt inclined to be offended that she should be in any way brought into this folly, but she was not certain whether remonstrance or complaint might not be more ridiculous than utter silence. After all, nobody knew anything about her or cared, she said. If she were to complain in any way, it would only grieve poor Mary, whom the thought that her brother could have offended her friend and leader would drive well-nigh distracted. "What does it matter if I am made a little ridiculous in my own eyes?" she asked herself. "It is only in my own eyes, I suppose. Mary will look on it all as delightful; her brother of course means it for the best, and thinks it superb poetry; and there is no one else likely to care either way. It is not much to be a little more ridiculous in my own eyes than I have already made myself."

Perhaps—perhaps—let it be said with hesitation and much caution—there was something not wholly unwelcome to our heroine in the idea that she could be Glory's queen and all the rest of it to any human creature, not to say any poet, just now. She felt humbled and deeply depressed. In her own eyes she was lowered by what she knew of her own heart. Her pride had received a terrible wound, almost a death-wound. The little world she had made so proudly for herself had all crumbled into dust. It is not wonderful if at such a time there should be, in spite of her sense of the ridiculous and her senses generally, a certain soothing influence in the fact that there still was some one in whose eyes she appeared a person of account and even of dignity. At all events, let it be frankly said that, when the first shock and stir of the ridiculous were passed, Minola was not inclined to think more harshly than before of the poor poet who called her his patroness and his queen. As to the expense of the publication, she was a little startled at first, but that sensation very quickly passed away. She was not enough of a woman of business yet to care about the cost of anything so long as she had the money to pay. It would run her hard in her first year of independent life to pay this much; but then she could pay it and live somehow, and it would only be a case for strict economy in the future for some time. Besides, it seemed that, whether she would or not, she was likely to have much more money than she wanted or could use for any purposes of her own. Then she was further stimulated to carelessness by Mr. Heron's letter.

"If he thinks I care about money, or the cost of serving a friend, he is mistaken," she said; "his caution and his protestations are thrown away on me."

For she was much inclined to be unjust and harsh in her mind towards Heron now. He had committed, all unconsciously, a terrible offence. He had, without knowing it, made her fall in love with him. So she made the best of the whole affair, cost, dedication, Glory's queen, and all; and when Mary Blanchet came to look at the precious volume, and to go into raptures over it, Minola did her very best to seem contented, and not even to suggest a criticism, or to ask what this or that meant. She reminded herself that the late Lord Lytton had written contemptuously of the "fools on fools" who "still ask what Hamlet means."

"This may be as far off from me as Hamlet from other people," she told herself. "Why confess myself a fool by asking what anything means? And in any case Mary Blanchet would not know any better than I."

By this resolve she made one woman happy.

But it was not only a woman on whom she had conferred happiness. Herbert Blanchet was as happy as even his sister could have wished him to be. The head of the poet swam in delight. He had never before been so proud and blest. He hung over his volume for hours; he could hardly get away from it. When he left it for a moment and tried to escape from its fascinations he found himself drawn back again into its presence. He touched fondly its soft satiny leaves as though they were the cheek of Beauty; he pressed his own cheek against them; he committed all the follies which we understand and admire in the immemorial raptures of the young lover or the father of the first-born.

"They must see this," he cried aloud. "They can't overlook a volume like this." "They" being, of course, that public whose opinion he had always despised—those critics whose praise he had always declared to be the worst censure to a man of true genius.

To do our poet justice, it must be owned that there was in his breast for the first time a deep, strong feeling of gratitude. That emotion came there with a strange overwhelming force, like that of intoxication to a man always rigidly sober before. If Minola had had him crowned a king, she could hardly have done any greater thing for him. Few men on earth can ever have had their dearest ambition so sweetly gratified as it was the lot of Herbert, the poet, to find his ambition gratified now. To have his poems so set before the world would have been a glory and a rapture, no matter though the patron's hand had been that of a withered old man or some fat frump of a dowager; but to be thus lifted to his longed-for pedestal by the hand of a young and beautiful woman was something which he had never dreamed of asleep, and seldom allowed even into the dreams of his wild, vain waking hours. The emotion called up by the experience was as new as the experience itself. Mr. Blanchet felt profoundly grateful. In that moment of excitement he would probably, if need were, have laid down his life for Minola.

If Minola had known what strange effect had been wrought in the breast of her poet, she would assuredly have thought her money well laid out, even although she had wanted it far more than she did. "To making a man happy, ten pounds," is the peculiar entry on which a famous essay in the *Spectator* was founded. To make a man grateful for the first time is surely a nobler piece of work than to make him merely happy, and it ought fairly to cost a good deal more. Minola had made a man for the first time both grateful and happy. The work was a little expensive in this case, but what miser will say that the money was thrown away?

It is not likely, however, that Minola would have been quite so much delighted if she could have known all the feelings that her generous, improvident patronage had awakened in the poet's breast. For Mr. Blanchet knew women well, he thought; and he did not believe that mere kindness alone could have impelled Minola to such an act of bounty. Nor, making every needful allowance for the friendship between Miss Grey and his sister, did he find in that a sufficing explanation of Minola's liberality. He set himself to think over the whole matter coolly and impartially, and he could come to no other conclusion than that Miss Grey admired him. He was a handsome fellow, as he knew very well, and tall, and romantic in appearance; what could be more natural than that a poetic young woman should fall in love with him? He felt sure that he had fallen in deepest love with her, but it is doubtful whether he was yet in a condition to analyse his own excited feelings very clearly. It is certain that he was madly in love with his poems, with their gorgeous first edition, with the pride and the prospect of the whole affair; and of course likewise in love with the patroness to whom he was indebted for so much of a strange delight. But how much was love of himself and how much of Minola he did not take time to consider.

There was an artistic and literary association to which Blanchet belonged, and amid which he passed most of his nights. It was not exactly a club, for it had neither definite rules nor even a distinct habitation. It was a little sect rather than a club. It was an association of men who believed each in himself, and all, at least for the present, in each other. Their essential condition of existence was scorn of the world's ways, politics, and theories of art. They held that man himself was a poor creature, unworthy of the artist's serious consideration. All that related to the well-being of that wretched animal in the way of political government they looked down upon with mere contempt. The science which professed to concern itself about his health, the social philosophy which would take any account of his moral improvement, were alike ridiculous in the eyes of this æsthetic school. If, however, any uninitiated person should imagine that in setting up art as the only serious business of life they were likely to accept any common definition of art, he would find himself as open to their scorn as if he had tried to improve a bad law or subscribed to the funds of some religious organisation. Art with them was their own art. The enlightened parson Thwackum, in "Tom Jones," observes that "When I mention religion I mean of course the Christian religion, and when I speak of the Christian religion I mean the Protestant religion, and when I speak of the Protestant religion I mean the religion of the Church of England." It was in this spirit that the confraternity to which Mr. Blanchet belonged defined art. They only meant their own particular sect; out of that there was no salvation. Art, it is said, hath no enemy but the ignorant. These artists, however, were the enemies of all art but their own.

At the present these genial brothers regularly met of nights in the lodgings of one of them, who happened to have a large studio in the West-Central region of London, where so much of this unfashionable story happens to be cast. Victor Heron had many times been told of the genius that burned by night in that favoured haunt, and had expressed a modest wish to be allowed to pass for an hour within its light. Mr. Blanchet was glad of the opportunity of introducing such a friend; for it somehow seemed as if the consideration of any member of the fraternity was enhanced among his brothers not a little by the fact that he could introduce into their midst some distinguished personage from the despised outer world. With them Victor Heron might very well pass for a distinguished public man, as, in fact, he already did, with no design of his own that way, in the eyes of Herbert Blanchet. To Victor the school was all composed of gifted and rising men, whom it was a pride to know or even to meet. To the school, on the other hand, Victor was a remarkable public man, a tremendous "swell," who had done some wondrous things in some far-off countries, and who, for all they knew at the time, might be regarded by the world as the prospective Prime Minister of England.

There was a peculiar principle of reciprocity tacitly recognised among these brothers in art. No one of them would admit that there was anything which his brother knew and he did not know. If one of them read an author for the first time, and came to meet his fellows proud of his freshly-acquired knowledge, he found no man among them who would admit that he had not from his birth upwards been equally familiar with the author in question. It would be easy, surely, some one may say, to expose such pretension. Just so; of course it would. But when one brother had shown to-night that his friends had never read Schopenhauer, and in point of fact could not read him if they tried, who should guarantee that same brother against a similar exposure of his own harmless little false pretences to-morrow when he professed to know all about Euripides? It was not found convenient in this little circle to examine too closely into the pretensions of each other. "Live and let live" was the motto of the school, so far as their esoteric professions were concerned.

There was indeed a legend that some malign person, acquainted with the peculiarities of the school, had once compelled them to invent a patron poet. It was done in this fashion: the malign person talked confidently and fluently to one of the order concerning a French poet, whom he described as a gifted apostle of a kindred school, and whom he was pleased to name De Patroque. The youth thus talked to was not to be outdone, or even to be instructed. He gave out that he had long had his eyes fixed reverently on the genius of the gifted De Patroque. He talked largely, not to say bouncingly, of the great De Patroque among his friends, who, not to be outdone in their turn, talked to him and to others of the new apostle. The fame of De Patroque grew and grew, until at last ill-natured persons affirmed that several essays on his genius, and fraternal hymns of honour, were composed for him by the admirers of his mythical career.

To this select circle Mr. Blanchet had for some time proposed to introduce his friend Victor Heron. On the very day when the first copies of the gorgeous poems were submitted to privileged eyes, Mr. Blanchet called on his friend. He found the friend a little put out by the unexpected lavishness of the manner in which the poetic enterprise had been carried on.

"This will be an awfully expensive business, I'm afraid," Heron said, in an embarrassed tone, for he felt that it was a sort of profanation to talk of money matters with a young poet. "I wish you had let me do this thing myself, Blanchet. I'd not have minded so far as I'm concerned. But I don't know about her, you see—she may not have much money. Then, young ladies are generally so enthusiastic; she may not have thought of what the thing would cost."

"You need not think about that," Herbert said loftily. "Miss Grey will be a rich woman one of these days"——

"But I don't see that that much alters the matter, although I am decidedly glad to hear it for her own sake, if it will make her any happier than she is now—which, I take it, is not by any means certain. But I don't see throwing away her money without her knowing all about it any the more."

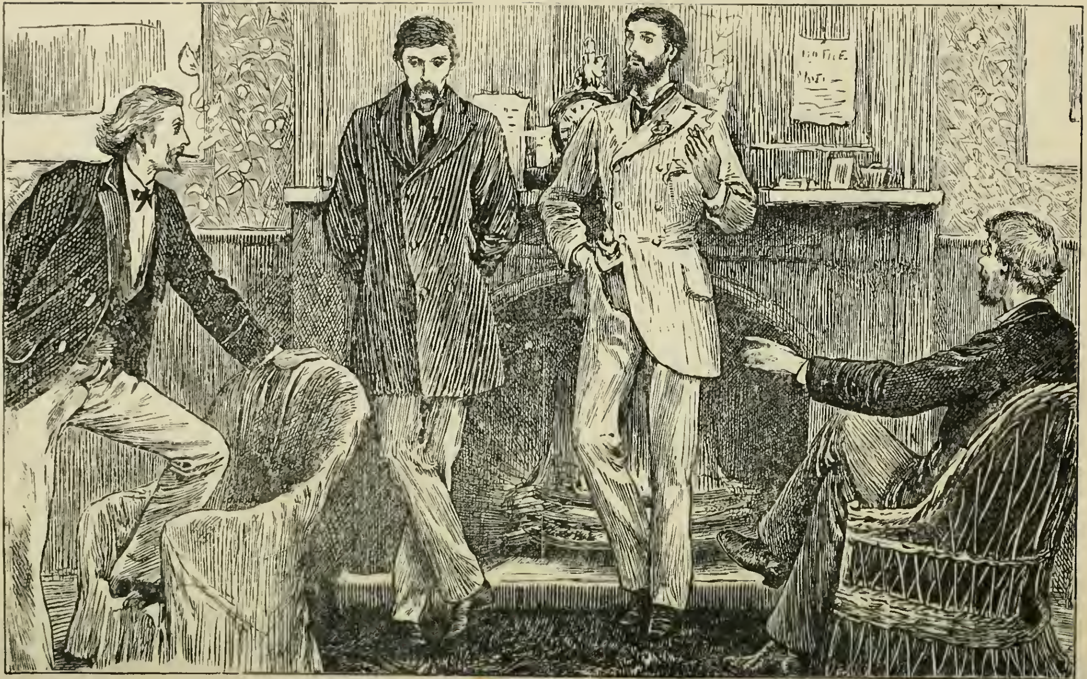
"Throwing away her money?" Herbert asked, in tones of lofty protest.

"Well, I don't mean that, of course," the good-natured Heron hastened to explain in all sincerity. "You know very well, my dear Blanchet, what I think of your merits and your poems, and of all true poets. I know that it is an honour for anyone, whether man or woman, to be allowed to help a poet to come out before the world and make a success. I only wish I had had the chance of doing such a thing for you; but this young lady, you know, I don't feel quite certain whether I ought to have spent her money so freely."

"I can reassure you, I think," the poet said, with chilling dignity; "I should never have allowed anyone to do anything for me without having satisfied myself that it was done in the unstinting spirit of friendship, and by some one whom such kindness would not hurt."

"All right; I am glad to hear you say so, of course, but you won't wonder at my scruples, perhaps"——

"Your scruples, my dear fellow, do you infinite honour," Mr. Blanchet said, with a slight dash of irony in his tone, which Heron did not at the moment perceive, being in truth engrossed by some



"The odious race of the unappreciated."

other thoughts. "But you may accept my assurance that there is no further occasion for them, and we will, if you please, change the subject."

Victor did not feel by any means well satisfied that there was no occasion for scruple, nor did he at all like his poetic friend's way of looking at the matter. But he reflected that Blanchet might after all have good warrant for what he had said, and that it was not for him to cavil at the generosity of a rich girl—if she were rich—towards a poor poet.

So they went along, the poet and his distinguished political friend, to the scene of the artistic and literary gathering, which the latter was so proud to see, and the former so proud to show.

We have all read in story about the effect of some little magic word, which once spoken makes that which was lovely before seem but loathly, and what was kindly wisdom sound like fatuous malignity. Was there some such ill-omened charm working all that night on Victor Heron? Nothing seemed to him like what he had expected. He was not impressed as he had felt sure he would be by the poets and other sons of genius. They did not seem to constitute an assembly of noble minds in whose midst he was to feel such reverence as the rude Gauls of history or legend felt in the presence of the Roman senators. The thoughts that he heard did not strike him as celestial in their origin. There was a good deal of disparagement and denunciation of absent authors and artists, which, if the talkers had not been men of genius, Victor would certainly have thought ill-natured and spiteful. There seemed, at least to his untutored mind, to be little more than a technical relish of art in all they said. It was not art they cared for, but only a clique and its tricks. A group of discontented spinsters girding at their younger sisters who were married could hardly have shown themselves more narrow-minded and malign. The effect on Victor was profoundly depressing. It was like that which might be wrought upon a youth who, after gazing in rapture on the performance of some queen of classic tragedy, is at his earnest desire taken to see her in her private life, and finds her slatternly of dress, mean of speech, wholly uninspired by her art, and only taking a genuine pleasure in disparagement or slander of her rivals.

If Victor had known the world better, he would have known that much, very much, of all this was but the mere affectation and nonsense of youth. These young men were as yet among the "odious race of the unappreciated." Yet a little, and some of them will make a success, and will have the credit of the world for what they do, and they will turn out good fellows, kindly, true, and even modest. Nothing makes some young men so insufferably conceited and aggressive as the idea that they are not successful, and that people know it. There are many of us mortals with whom prosperity only agrees. On the other hand, some of these youths will fail early, completely, and wholesomely in their artistic attempts, and will find out the fact for good, and will retire from the field altogether, and settle down to something else, and make a success, or at least a decent living, in some other way of life; and will forget all the worser teaching of their earlier days, and will look back without bitterness on the time when they tried to impress a dull world, and will have no feeling of hatred for those who have done better, but will marry and bring up children, and be Philistines and happy. Youth has only one season —luckily for a good many of us, who are decent fellows enough as long as we are content to be ourselves, and can do without affectation.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### "UNDER BONNYBELL'S WINDOW-PANES."

BUT there was something more in Victor Heron's feeling of depression that night than came from the mere fact that he had found a few young artists not quite such heroic spirits as he thought they ought to be. It was the demeanour of Herbert Blanchet that especially spoiled the evening for him. In truth, the head of the poet was not a strong one, and was very easily turned by any little stimulant of whatever kind. His volume of poems this night affected all his being. He felt sure that he was at last about to force himself upon the recognition of the world, and he made up his mind that Miss Grey was in love with him. He conveyed hints of his approaching good fortune to his companions; and he received at first, with benign courtesy, their compliments on the success that seemed to await him in life and love. But when some too forward person suggested that he could possibly guess at the name of the heiress whose heart and hand were to bless the lucky poet, then Blanchet became gravely and even severely dignified.

"You will excuse me, Mellifont," he said grandly, the brandy and soda having, as was the wont of any such liquor taken by our poor poet, gone straight upward to his head, "you will excuse me, I am sure, if I say, this is not exactly a subject for jocularity, or even, permit me to add, for general conversation, although among friends. My distinguished friend, Mr. Heron, will, I am sure, exactly appreciate what I say. Things may not be so completely settled as to make it proper that they should be spoken of as if—as if, in short, they were settled; you will excuse me, Mellifont, my dear fellow—you will excuse me."

Victor Heron thought it time for him to go, and rose accordingly, and Mr. Blanchet insisted on accompanying him down the stairs and to the door of the house.

"I thought it right, you know," the over-dignified poet said, "to put a stop to that sort of thing. Men have no right to make such inferences. I should have no right myself to assume that things were settled in that sort of way. It is not just to others—to another, at least. You appreciate my motives, I am sure, Heron, my dear friend?"

"I don't know that I even quite understand what your friend was talking about," said Heron coldly. "But if it was about any lady, I should think such conjecturing highly improper and impertinent; and I should be rather inclined to put a stop to it even more quickly."

"Quite my idea—I am glad you entirely concur with me, and approve of the course I have taken. But of course you would do so. I knew I could count on your approval. By the way, you know Mellifont?"

"The man you talked to just now?"

"Yes, Mellifont—a very good fellow, though a little too fond of talking—I have had to reprove him more than once, I can tell you. But a very good fellow for all that, and one of the only true artists now alive. He is a composer you must hear him play some bits from his opera. He is at work on an opera, you know—or perhaps you have not heard?"

"I have not heard—no. I am rather out of the way of such things, I fear," said Victor, beginning to feel, in spite of himself, a certain awe of a man who could compose an opera, and thinking that, after all, a certain allowance must be made for the genius of one who could do such things.

"Oh, you must hear some of it soon! We feel satisfied that it will sound the death-knell of all the existing schools of music. They are all wrong, sir, from first to last, from Mozart to Wagner—all wrong except Mellifont."

Victor was for the moment really staggered by the genius of this great man.

"What is his opera to be called?" he asked, not venturing to hazard any compromising observation.

"The Seven Deadly Sins. It is to be in seven acts, and each act is to give an entirely new illustration of a deadly sin—which Mellifont will show to be the only true virtues of mankind. It will make a revolution, I can tell you."

Victor thought it could hardly fail to do that if it were at all successful in the object set out by its author.

"It is to have seven heroines," the poet went on, still at the door, and refusing to allow Victor to depart: "Lot's daughters—let me see—Messalina, Locusta, Jezebel, I think, Theodora, and I believe Mrs. Brownrigg. It will be a splendid thing."

It was not easy for Victor to get away, for the poet had to tell him of other great works of art that were in the contemplation of members of the school. At length Blanchet released him, thanking him grandly for the assistance he had lent to the bringing out of his book, but adding even more grandly some words that fell painfully on Victor's ear.

"I hope to be independent of publishers and of drudgery before long; I fancy—I rather believe it depends upon myself, and I think I owe it to my own genius to raise myself above the necessity of drudgery. I could then do something worthy of myself, and the few whose praise I value."

Victor escaped at last and walked away. He was in a very discontented mood; an unusual thing for him. He could not help believing that there must be, or at least might be, something in the idea which Blanchet so evidently wished people to receive. He feared that there must be something more than mere kindly patronage in Miss Grey's generosity towards Blanchet. The thought was strangely disagreeable to him. He could not think with patience of such a girl being in love with such a man. He was now disposed to exaggerate the demerits of the poet, and to believe anything mean of one who could take a girl's money and give out as an excuse for taking it that she was in love with him. "If I had a sister," he thought, "and any fellow were to give such hints about her, I wonder how I should like it, and I wonder how much of it I should stand!"

He felt sorry, very sorry, for Minola, and perhaps a little angry with her too for allowing to any man the chance of suggesting such things. The more he thought of her and all he had seen of her, the less she seemed fitted for such a lover as Mr. Blanchet. She had impressed Victor greatly by her manners, her fresh and frank character, and the simple, trusting generosity which was her transparent attribute. He began to look on the poet now as a mere fortune-hunter, who was fastening upon the girl because of the money which he expected her to have. He did not know how consuming a passion is the vanity of the small artistic mind—the mind which has art's ambition only, and not art's inspiration. Mr. Blanchet was not a fortune-hunter in the ordinary sense. His poems were to him as yet much dearer than any fortune. He was drawn to Minola, not because she had money, but because, having money, she was willing to spend some of it in bringing out his poems in a handsome edition.

Our hero's Quixotic temper was thoroughly roused by the thought of some wrong which he fancied was about to be done to Minola. He was not one of those lucky beings who can let things alone. He never could let things alone. Had he had the gift of those who can, he would just then have been governor of some rising colony, and would have been in a fair way of promotion. He was tormented by the thought that there was something he ought to do to save Minola from some vaguely terrible fate, and by not being able to see what the something was which lay within his power to do. Before he had walked many yards he had worked himself into the idea that a plot of some sort was in preparation to entrap Minola into a marriage with one who, poet or not, was wholly unworthy of her.

His energetic spirit at length suggested something to be done. It was not, perhaps, a very practical or useful stroke of policy, but it was the only thing which occurred to him, and the only thing which he did just then. He started off at full speed to walk under the windows of the house where Miss Grey was living. It was now fully midnight, and of course he had not the slightest idea of seeing Minola, and, indeed, would have been greatly embarrassed if he had seen her. But he started off, nevertheless, to walk under her windows with as eager a step and as steady a purpose as if he were really hastening to rescue her from some imminent danger. It was only a short walk from where he then was to Minola's lodgings; but Heron was so eager in his purpose that the way seemed miles, which he was covering with hasty strides.

When he reached the house where Minola lived, the aspect of the place was just such as, if he had been a lover, he might have expected or desired to find. The house was all in darkness save for one window. There was a looking-glass in that window, making it plain to the least observant of human creatures that it must be the window of a bedroom. How could a lover doubt that that must be the window of the room which was hers, and that she then watched the stars of midnight, and that she thought of love, and that her soul was, as Jean Paul puts it, in the blue ether? For the moment Victor Heron found himself wishing that he were a lover—were the lover of whom the lady, fancy-fixed, in that one lighted room, might be thinking. But if it were Minola's room, he thought, she certainly had not him or any memory of him in her mind. It was a clear, soft midnight, and the moon that shone on the near roof of the British Museum seemed as poetic and as sad as though it fell on the ruins of the Parthenon No practice in colonial administration can wholly squeeze the poetic and the romantic out of the breast of a young man of Heron's time of life. As he stood there, his grievance seemed as far off as the moon herself, but not by any means so poetic and beautiful. He paced up and down, feeling very young and odd, and unlike his usual self. He was happy in a queer, boyish way that had a certain shamefaced sensation about it, as when a youth for the first time drinks suddenly of some sparkling wine, and feels his brain and senses all aflame with delicious ecstasy, and is afraid of the feeling although he delights in it.

It was a natural part of the half-fantastic chivalry of his character that he should have felt a sort of satisfaction in thus for the moment being near Minola, as if by that means he were in some sort protecting her against danger. If at that time any softer and warmer feeling than mere friendship were mingling itself with Heron's sensations, he did not then know it. He thought of the girl as a sweet friend, new to him, indeed, but very dear, in whose happiness he felt deeply interested, and over whom he had taken it into his head that he had a right to watch. She seemed to be strangely alone in the world of London, and indeed, to be at the same time not suited for anything in London but just such isolation. He never could think of her as mixing in the ordinary society of the metropolis. He could not think of her as one of the common crowd, following out mechanically the registered routine of the season's amusements, listening to the commonplace talk, and compliments, and cheap cynicism of the drawing-room and the five o'clock tea. To him she appeared as different from all that, and as poetically lifted above it, as if she were Hawthorne's Hilda, high up in her Roman tower, among her doves, and near to the blue sky. Except in the home of the Moneys, Heron had never seen Minola in anything that even looked like society; and there was a good deal of the odd and the fresh in that home which took it out of the range of the commonplace, and did not interfere with his poetic idealisation of Minola. Her presence and her way of life appeared alike to him a poetic creation. So quiet, self-sufficing a life, alone in the midst of the crowd, such simple strength of purpose, such a tranquil choice of the kind of existence that suited her best, such generosity, and such gracious loving kindness,—all this together made up a picture which had a natural fascination for a chivalrous young man, who had never before had time to allow the softer and more romantic elements of his nature any chance of expression. It may be that for the present Minola was to him but the first suggestion of an embodiment of all the vague, floating thoughts and visions of love and womanhood that must now and then cross the spiritual horizon of every young man, no matter how closely he may be occupied with colonial affairs and the condition of the coloured races. The hero of a French story, whereof there is not otherwise overmuch good to be said, speaks with a feeling as poetic as it is true when he says that in the nightingale's song he heard the story of the love that he ought to have known, but which had not yet come to him. Perhaps in the eyes and in the voice of Minola, Victor Heron unconsciously found this story told for him.

However that might be, it is certain that Heron found a curious satisfaction this night in passing again and again before Minola's door, and making believe to himself as if he were guarding her against danger. He might have remained on guard in this way, Heaven knows how long—for, as we know, he was not fond of early going to bed—but that he suddenly "was aware," as the old writers put it, of another watcher as well as himself. It was unmistakable. Another man came up and passed slowly once or twice under the same windows, and on the side of the street where Heron had put himself on guard. Then the new-comer, observing, no doubt, that he was not alone, had crossed to the other side of the street, and Heron thought he was only a chance passer and was gone altogether. Presently, however, he crossed the road again, and stood a short distance away from Heron as if he were watching him. Now, though Victor Heron was not a lover, he had just as much objection as any lover could have to being seen by observant eyes when watching under a girl's window. The mere thought recalled him at once to chilling commonplace. He was for going away that moment; all the delight was gone out of his watching. But he was a little curious to know if the new-comer were really only a casual stranger whom his movements had stirred into idle curiosity. So he went straightway down the street and passed the unwelcome intruder. He felt sure the face of the man was known to him, although he could not at first recall to mind the person's identity. He felt sure, too, by the way in which the man looked at him and then turned suddenly off, that the new-comer had recognised him as well. This was tormenting for the moment, as he went on perplexing himself by trying to think who it was that he had seen in this unexpected and unwished-for way. He walked slowly, and looked back once or twice. He could not see his disturber any more. The man had either gone away or was, perhaps, standing in the shadow of a doorway. Suddenly an idea flashed upon Heron.

"Why, of course," he exclaimed, "it's he! I ought to have known! It's the man from Keeton—the hated rival."

By "hated rival," however, Heron did not mean a rival in love, but only in electioneering; for he now knew that it was Mr. Sheppard he had seen, and he remembered how Mr. Sheppard, when he met him in Minola's room, had seemed oddly sullen and unwilling to fraternise. This was the reason why Heron called him the hated rival. His own idea of a rival in an election contest was that of a person whom one ought to ask to dinner, and treat with especial courtesy and fair offer of friendship.

Suddenly, however, another idea occurred to him.

"What on earth can he be doing there," he asked, "under her window? Can it be possible that he, too, is a lover?"

He, too? Who, then, was *the* lover—the other lover? Heron did not believe, and would not admit, that Blanchet was a genuine lover at all. The whole theory of Victor's duty to watch under Minola's windows was based on the assumption that Blanchet was no true lover, but a cunning hunter of fortune. Why, then, ask, Was Mr. Sheppard, too, a lover? Heron did not at the moment stop to ask himself any such question, but, after a while, the absurdity of his words occurred to him,and he was a little amused at, and a good deal ashamed of, his odd and hasty way of putting the question.

"Why shouldn't he be there as well as I?" he said. "Why should he be a lover any more than I?"

Then he began to assure himself that the hated rival must have been there only by chance; and it is doubtful whether, if he had thought much longer over the question, he would not have ended by convincing himself that nothing but the merest chance had brought him, too, under Minola's window-panes.

It was, indeed, Minola's window under which he had been watching; and she, too, was watching, and never dreamed that he was so near. She looked from her window not long after he had gone, and saw the street all lonely, and felt lonely herself, and shuddered, thinking that life would ever be a dreary piece of work for her. It is a melancholy fact that all that time, and even long after she had gone in shuddering from the window, poor Sheppard was standing in a doorway at the opposite side of the street, and that she not only never saw him, but never thought of him. Her thoughts were of Victor Heron, and of her own folly and her own love—that love which seemed such folly, which was so hopeless, which she knew, or, at least, believed, it was a sort of treason against friendship to indulge, although in absolute secret.

In Uhland's pretty poem called "Departure" a youth is going on his wanderings, and his comrades escort him a little on his way, and as they go along they pass beneath the windows of a pretty girl. The lad looks up, and would fain, if he might, have a rose from her hand, and yet tells himself that he would not have it—for to what end to have the rose, when she whom he loved cared nothing for him, and the rose would only wither with him, and to no purpose? When he has gone, the girl strains her eyes after him in grief, and wonders what the world is to be to her now that he she loved is going far away, and never knew of her love. A few timely words might have spared all the heart-ache, no doubt; but it will be a very different world from that which we have known when all the words that might have been timely are spoken in time, or even when the feelings that might prompt the timely words have learned their own meaning at the right moment to give it breath.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### "COUNSEL BEWRAYED."

THE next morning Heron rose with a distinct purpose of doing something to put Minola on her guard. His purpose to do something was much more clear than his knowledge of what he had better do. Anyhow, he thought he would go and see Minola, and say something to her. When he began to speak, he would probably hit upon the thing to say. As he might have put it himself, Providence would pull him through somehow. The first thing was to get to speech of Minola. This, at least, ought not to be hard to compass.

His first idea was simply to go to her house and ask to see her. But when he was near the scene of his mounting guard the past night he began to think of the difficulties that would be put in his way if anyone else were present. How, for example, could he possibly say what he specially wanted to say if Mary Blanchet were present, or were even coming and going in and out of the room, as she was almost sure to be? On the other hand, how could he formally ask for a private conversation with Minola without stirring all manner of absurd curiosity and conjecture? At the very least, Mary Blanchet would be sure to ask, when he had gone, what he had come to say; and that would, under the circumstances, be rather embarrassing for Minola. He gave up, therefore, the idea of seeing Miss Grey at her own house.

Another plan at once occurred to him. He knew how often Minola walked in Regent's Park—he would go and walk there about the time which she usually chose, and he would go again and again until he met her. So he started off for the Park, greatly relieved in mind to be doing anything. All the time there was a good deal of work on his own account which he might, and, if he had been at all a sensible young man, would, have been doing. The time that he was spending in trying to ward off from Minola a supposed danger might, if properly used, have procured him an interview with a Cabinet Minister, or paved the way for easy success at the future election for Keeton. There were twenty things which Mr. Money had often told him he must do if he would have the faintest hope of any success in anything; and all these things he was utterly neglecting because he chose to think that he was called on to give some advice to a girl who perhaps would repay him with little thanks for his officious attempt at interference.

He walked slowly through the Park, along the paths which he knew that she loved, and made for the canal. It was a soft, grey day, with no sky seen. The air was surcharged with moisture; but it was not raining, and the grass was only as if a heavy dew had settled on it. The soft breath that floated over the fields was warm and languid. Only three colours were to be seen all across the Park: the green of the grass, the grey of the clouds, or of the one cloud rather, and the dull black of the tree-trunks. These colours, indeed, were softened, and shaded away, and blended into each other, with indefinable varieties of tone and delicate interchanges of effect. It was just the day to make a certain class of observer curse the stupid and foggy monotony of the English climate. It was the day, too, to gladden the heart of a certain refined class of artist with whom delicate effects of tone and shade are precious and familiar. Certainly it might be called a day of poetic cloud. To Victor, who had long been used to the unwinking steadiness of a tropical sun, there was something specially refreshing and delightful in the grass, the trees, and the cloud. He found himself yearning in heart for a life which would leave him more time and thought for the skies, the trees, and the grass.

Suddenly the scene vanished from his eyes, and he only saw Minola Grey. He was now approaching the canal, and he saw her leaning over the bridge and looking into the water. It was early in the day—too early for the nursemaids and the children and the ordinary walkers, and there was no one but Minola now in Heron's sight.

The girl, as she leaned on the railing of the bridge and looked into the water, might have been adopted by any artist as a model-figure of Melancholy. If Victor had been less in a hurry with everything—if he had remained where he then was and looked at her unperceived for a few moments, Heaven knows what inspiration of ideas, what revealings about himself and her, might have come into his mind. But Victor waited for nothing—seldom in life gave himself much time to think; and, in any case, would have had an instinctive objection to even a moment's unperceived watching of a meditating girl. He was so rejoiced at the readiness with which his desire to meet her had been gratified, that he thought he could hardly seize his chance too soon. In his eagerness he even forgot that the task he had undertaken was rather embarrassing, and that he had not yet made up his mind as to what he was going to say. He was by Minola's side in a moment.

She was so much surprised and startled that Victor was quite ashamed of having come upon her in such a sudden way. He had forgotten that all women have nerves, and get startled in ways unknown to men. At least, he assumed it must be for some reason of this kind that Minola seemed so much disturbed when he came up, but he certainly had not supposed that girls so clever and healthy as Miss Grey were usually troubled with nerves.

Minola recovered herself very soon, however, and got rid of all appearance of mere nervous embarrassment, although there was for a while a certain constraint in her manner.

" Have you been long here ? " he asked.

" Not very long ; at least, it did not seem long. I like to be here at this time ; there are so few people."

" Yes ; I knew you were likely to be here about this time if you were coming at all to-day," he said ; an awkward remark, as it suggested that he had come expressly to meet her.

" I come here at all manner of times," she said ; " but I think I like this time the best."

" You are not going any farther, I suppose ? "

" No ; I thought of turning back now, and going home."

" I'll walk a little way with you, if you will allow me ? "

Of course she had no objection to make. They had walked in that place often before, and it was a matter of certainty that when they did meet they would walk together. He need hardly have asked her if she would allow him to walk with her now.

So they turned and walked a little off the beaten track, and under the trees. When they had walked a certain distance in one direction Victor turned round and she turned with him, as if she were merely obeying his signal of command. It has already been said more than once that Mr. Heron always went on as if he were ever so much older than she, and belonging, indeed, to a different stage of life. He bore himself as a man of forty or thereabouts might do with a young woman of Minola's age.

"How do you like Blanchet's book?" he asked abruptly.

"It is very beautiful, I suppose; it's a little too ornamental and fantastic perhaps for my taste; but I suppose that is in keeping with the style of the poems; and *he* is delighted with the book."

"It has cost a great deal of money—much more than it ought to have cost; I don't like the thing at all."

"But think of the joy given to the poet. It is surely not very dearly bought at the price. I never knew of a man so happy."

"Yes, yes; that is all very well for him ——"

"It is very well for me too, Mr. Heron—to be able to do a kindness for any human creature. I dare say it has given me as much pleasure as it has given him, and made me quite as proud too—and is not that something to gain?"

"Still, I can't help feeling uneasy about this thing. It has cost a heap of money, much more than I ever supposed it would, and I seem as if I had brought you into all the expense."

"How could that be, Mr. Heron? I expressly wished Mr Blanchet to do as he pleased; and he understood me exactly as I wished him to do. You had nothing to do with it."

"Oh, yes! I had something to do with it; and then—excuse me—you are rather young perhaps ——"

"Perhaps I can't be expected to know my own mind; or ought not to be trusted with the spending of my own money?"

"No, I didn't mean that; but you might not have known exactly what you were being let in for; and it is a good deal of money for a girl to pay."

"And in fact you don't think a girl ought to be allowed to spend her money without some wise person of the superior sex to guide her hand? Thank you very much, Mr. Heron, but I think I may have my own way in this at least. I have often told you that I left Keeton because I could not stand the control of wiser and better persons than myself. I am not at all a good girl, Mr. Heron; I never said I was. The counsels of the wise are sadly thrown away on me, I fear."

She spoke in a hard and ungenial tone, which he had not heard her use before. He could not help looking at her with an expression of wonder. She saw the expression and understood it.

"You are shocked at my want of sweet feminine docility? I ought not to have any ideas of my own, I suppose?"

"No; I am not shocked, and I am not at all such a ridiculous person as you would seem to suppose, and I have none of the ideas you set down to me; but you don't seem quite like yourself, and you speak as if you were offended with me for something."

"Offended?—oh, no; how could I possibly be offended? I am very much obliged, on the contrary, for the trouble you take for one who seems to you quite unable to take care of herself."

Victor did not like her tone. There was something aggressive in it. He was not experienced enough in the ways of society to cry content to that which grieved his heart, and his thoughts therefore showed themselves pretty clearly in his face.

"I don't like Blanchet's taking all this money," he said, after a moment of silence. "I don't think a man ought to take such a helping hand as that from—well, from ——"

"From a woman, you were going to say? Why not from a woman, Mr. Heron? Are we never to do a kind thing, we unfortunate creatures, because we are women and are young?"

"No; I don't say that; but there are things it may become a woman to do, and which it doesn't quite so well become a man to profit by. I don't think Blanchet ——"

"Mr. Blanchet seems to have a higher idea of what a woman's friendship may be than you have, Mr. Heron. He does not see any degradation in allowing a woman to hold him out a helping hand when he wants one. I like his ideas better than yours. You say you would have done this little service for him if you had been allowed. Why should there be any greater degradation to him in having it done by me? At all events, you can't wonder if I don't see it all at once."

"Of course, if you are satisfied and pleased, there is nothing more to be said in the matter."

"I am satisfied and pleased—why should I not be? I asked a friend to let me do something to help him, and he answered me just in the spirit in which I spoke. Of course I am glad to find that there is even one man who could take a friendly offer in a friendly way. There are not many such men, I suppose?"

Victor could not help smiling at her emphatic way of expressing her scorn of men.

"I do believe you have really turned yourself misanthropical by reading 'Le Misanthrope,'" he said

"Well, why should there not be a woman Alceste?—although

I never knew any woman in real life more worthy to be classed with him than the men we meet in real life are. Miss Alceste, I think, would sound very pretty. I wish I could think myself entitled to bear such a name."

"Or Miss Misanthrope," he suggested. "How would that do for a young lady's name?"

"Admirably, I think. That would get over all the difficulty, too, and save foolish persons from thinking that one was setting up for another Alceste. I should like very much to be called Miss Misanthrope."

"If you go on as you are doing, you will soon be entitled to bear the name," said Victor gravely. "At the present moment, I don't know that I should much object to that."

"No? I am glad that anything I am likely to do has a chance of pleasing you. But why should you not object just at present? Why not now as well as at any other time?"

"Because I should like you to be a little misanthropical just now, and a little distrustful—of men, that is to say, Miss Grey."

She coloured slightly, although she had no idea of his meaning yet.

"I always thought you were full of trust in the whole human race, Mr. Heron; I thought you liked everybody and believed in everybody. Now you tell me to distrust all mankind."

"I didn't say that."

"No? Some particular person, then?"

"Some particular person, perhaps. At least, I don't mean exactly that," Heron hastened to explain, his conscience smiting him at the thought that perhaps after all he might be suggesting unjust suspicions of an absent man who was a sort of friend. "I only mean that you are very generous and unselfish, and that there might be persons who might try to make use of your good-nature, and whom perhaps you might not quite understand. I don't know whether I ought to speak about this at all."

"Nor I, Mr. Heron, I am sure; for I really don't know what youare speaking of, or what mysterious danger is hanging over me. But I hope there is something of the kind, for I should so like to resemble a heroine of romance."

"There is not anything very romantic in prospect so far as I know," he said, now almost wishing he had said nothing, and yet feeling in his heart a serious fear that Minola might be led to put too much faith in Blanchet. "But if I might speak out freely, and without any fear of your misunderstanding me or being offended, there is something, Miss Grey, that I should very much like to say." He spoke in an uneasy and constrained way, forcing himself on to an ungracious task.

"You have been preaching distrust to me, Mr. Heron, and you have been finding fault generally with all women who trust anybody. To show you how your lessons are thrown away on me, I shall certainly trust you as much as you like, and I shall not misunderstand anything you say, nor be offended by it." There was something of her old sweet frankness in her manner as she spoke these words, and Heron was warmed by it.

"Well," he said at last, "you are a girl, and young, and living almost alone, and people tell me you are going to have money. You have promised to excuse my blunt way of talking out, haven't you? I almost wish for your sake, as you like to live this kind of life, that you had just enough of money to live upon and no more; but I hear that that is not the case, or at all events is not to be. Well, the only thing is that people who I think are not true, and are not honest, and who are not worthy of you in any way whatever, may try to make you think that they are true, and sincere, and all the rest of it."

"Well, Mr. Heron, what if they do?"

"You may perhaps be persuaded to believe them."

"And even if I am, what matter is that? I had much rather be deceived in such things than know the truth, if the truth is to mean that people are all deceitful."

"I don't think you want to understand me," he said.

"Indeed I do; I only want to understand you; but I fail as yet. Why not speak out, Mr. Heron, like a man and a brother? If there is anything you want me to know, do please make me know it in the clearest way."

She was growing impatient.

"You will have lovers," he said, driven to despair when it seemed as if she could not understand a mere hint of any kind; "of course you must know that you are attractive and all that—and if you come to have money, you will be besieged with fellows—with admirers, I mean. Do be a little distrustful—of one at least; I don't like him, and I wish you didn't—and I can't very well tell you why, only that he does not seem to me to be manly or even honest."

She coloured a little; but she also smiled faintly, for she still did not understand him.

"I suppose I must know the man you mean, Mr. Heron; for I think he is the only man I ever heard you say anything against, and I have not forgotten. But what can have made you think that I needed any lecture about him? I don't suppose he ever thought about me in that way in his life, or would marry one of my birth and my bringing up even if I asked him. And in any case, Mr. Heron, I would not marry him even if he asked me. But what a shame it seems to arrange in advance for the refusing of a man who never showed the faintest intention of making an offer!"

At first Heron did not quite understand her. Then he suddenly caught her meaning.

"Oh, that fellow? I didn't mean him. I never could have supposed that you were likely to be taken in by him."

"To do him justice, Mr. Heron, he never seems to have any thought of taking anyone in. Such as he is, he always shows himself, I think."

"Oh, I don't care about him — —"

"Nor I, Mr. Heron, I assure you. But whom, then, do you care about—in that sense?"

"I distrust a man who takes a woman's money in a thoughtless and selfish way," Heron said impetuously. "That is a man I would not trust. Don't trust him, Miss Grey; believe me, he is a cad—I mean, a selfish and deceitful fellow. I can't bear the thought of a girl like you being sacrificed—or sacrificing yourself, as you might do perhaps, and I tell you that he is just the sort of man ——"

"Are you speaking of Mr. Blanchet now, Mr. Heron?" Her tone was cold and clear. She was evidently hurt, but determined now to have the whole question out.

"Yes, I am speaking of Blanchet, of course—of whom else could I be speaking in such a way?"

"Mr. Blanchet is my friend, Mr. Heron; I thought he was a friend of yours as well."

"Well, I thought he was a manly, honest sort of fellow—I don't think so now," Victor went on impetuously, warming himself as he went into increasing strength of conviction. "I know you will hate me for telling you this, but I can't help that. I am as much interested in your happiness as if—as if you were my sister—and if you were my sister I would just do the same."

It would, indeed, be idle to attempt to describe the course of the feelings that ran through Minola's breast as she listened to the words of this kind which he continued to pour out. But out of all that swept through her—out of shame, surprise, anger, grief—the one thought came uppermost, and survived, and guided her—the thought that she had only to leave Heron's appeal unanswered, and her secret was safe for ever.

She made up her mind, and was self-contained and composed to all appearance again.

"Let us not say any more about this, Mr. Heron; I am sure you mean it as a friend; and I never could allow myself to feel offended by anything said in friendship. I am sorry you have such an opinion of Mr. Blanchet. I have a much better opinion of him; I like him better than I like most men; but you know we have just agreed that I ought to be called 'Miss Misanthrope,' and I assure you I mean to do my very best to deserve the name. No—please don't say any more—I had rather not hear it, indeed; and if you know anything of women, Mr. Heron, you must know that we never take advice on these matters. No; trust to my earning my name of Miss Misanthrope, but don't tell me of the demerits of this or that particular man; I had rather hate men in the general than in all the particular cases—and how long we must have talked about this nonsense, for here is the gate of the Park; and Mary Blanchet will be thinking that I am lost!"

They almost always parted at this park gate. This time he felt that he must not attempt to go any farther with her. She smiled and nodded to him with a manner of constrained friendliness, and went her way; and Heron's heart was deeply moved, for he feared that he had lost his friend.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MR. ST. PAUL'S MYSTERY.

Two events occurring almost together affected a good deal some of the people of this story. The first was the death of Mrs. Saulsbury.

Miss Grey was at once invited by the lawyers who had the charge of her father's affairs to visit Keeton, in order to become fully acquainted with the new disposition of things in which she had so much interest. Thereupon Mr. Money announced that, as Miss Grey had no very close friend to look after her interests, he was resolved to put himself in the place of a parent or some near relation, and go with her and see that all her interests were properly cared for. Minola was unwilling to put him to so much trouble and loss of time, well knowing how absorbed in business he was; but he set all her remonstrances aside with blunt, good-humoured kindness.

"Lucy is coming with us," he said, "if you don't think her in the way; it might be pleasant for you to have a companion."

"I should so much like to go with Nola," pleaded Lucy.

"Oh, I shall be delighted if Lucy will go," Minola said, not well knowing how to put into words her sense of all their kindness. It was really a great relief to her to have Lucy's companionship in such a visit. Mary Blanchet did not like to go back even for a few days to Keeton. The poetess objected to seeing ever again the place where she considered that art and she had been degraded by her servitude in the Court-house. So the conditions of the visit were all settled.

But there arose suddenly some new conditions which Minola had never expected. The long-looked-for vacancy at length occurred in the representation of Keeton. The sitting member announced his determination to resign his seat as soon as the necessary arrangements for such a step could be put into effect. It was imperative that Victor Heron should lose no time in throwing himself upon the vacant borough. Mr. Money and Lucy rattled up to Minola's door one morning breathless with the news. Lucy's eyes were positively dancing with excitement and delight.

" It seems to me that there's going to be a regular invasion of your borough, Miss Grey," Mr. Money said. " We're all going to be there. You see that you are under no manner of obligation to me. I must have gone down to Keeton in any case ; it's one of the lucky things that don't often befall a busy man like me to be able to kill the two birds with the one stone. I must take care of our friend Heron as well as of you. He would be doing some ridiculous thing if there were no elder to look after him. He is as innocent of the dodges of an English election as you are of the ways of English lawyers. So we'll be all together ; that will be very pleasant. Of course we'll not interfere with you—you shall be just as quiet as you like while we are doing our electioneering."

What could Minola say against all this arrangement, which seemed so satisfactory and so delightful to her friends? It was not pleasant for her to be brought thus into a sort of companionship with Victor Heron. But it would be far less pleasant, it would indeed be intolerable and not to be thought of, that she should in any way raise an objection or make a difficulty which might hint of the feelings that possessed her.

"After all, what does it matter?" she asked herself as Mr. Money was speaking. " I shall have to suffer this kind of thing in some way for half my life, I suppose. It is no one's fault but my own. Why should I disturb the arrangements of these kind people because of any weaknesses of mine? If women will be fools, at least they ought to try to hide their folly. This is as good practice for me as I could have."

So she told Mr. Money and Lucy that any arrangement that suited them would suit her, and that she would be ready to go the moment he gave the word. Then Mr. Money hastened away to look after other things, and Lucy remained behind "to help Nola with her preparations," as she insisted on putting it, but partly, as Minola felt only too sure, to talk with her about Victor Heron.

Since Heron had offered her his advice in the Park, and she had put it aside, Minola and he had only met once or twice. Then he had attempted, the first time of their meeting, to renew his apologies, and she had put them lightly away, as she already had done the advice, and had given him to understand that she wished to hear no more of the matter. She had hoped that by assuming a manner of indifference she might lead him to forget the whole affair. But he did not understand her, and really believed that he had lost her friendship for ever by the manner in which he had spoken against Herbert Blanchet. He was troubled for her much more than for himself, believing, or at least fearing, that she had set her heart on a man unworthy of her. He kept away from her therefore, assuming that his society was no longer welcome, and resolute not to intrude on her.

Minola had hoped that the worst was over, and that he and she were likely to settle gradually and unnoticed by others into a condition of ordinary acquaintanceship. This melancholy hope, to her a cruel necessity in itself, but yet the best hope she could see now left for her, was likely to be disturbed for a while by this ill-omened visit to Keeton.

Minola was busy making her preparations for going to Keeton, and with a very heavy heart. Everything about the visit was now distressing to her. The occasion was mournful; she dreaded long talks and discussions with Mr. Saulsbury; she dreaded meeting old acquaintances in Keeton; she shrank from the responsibilities of various kinds that seemed to be thrust upon her. When she left Keeton she thought she had done with it for ever. Where was the free life she had arranged for herself? Nothing seemed to turn out as she had expected.

Meanwhile Mary Blanchet and Lucy Money were both delighted, and in their different ways, at the prospect of Minola's visit to Keeton. Mary saw her leader and patroness come back rich, and ready to be distinguished and to confer distinction. Lucy Money had the prospect of variety, of a holiday with Minola whom she loved, and of being very often in the society of Victor Heron. Minola was, if anything, made additionally sad by the thought that it was not in her power to share their feelings, and the fear that she might seem a wet blanket sometimes on their happiness.

Lucy had been with her all the morning, helping her with Mary to make preparations for the journey. Minola was glad when it was found that some things were wanting, and Lucy and Mary offered to go out and buy them in Oxford Street.

Minola was enjoying the sense of being alone, and was, at the same time, secretly accusing herself of want of friendship because she enjoyed it, when a card was brought to her, and she was told that the gentleman said he wanted to speak to her, if she pleased, "rather particular." The card was that of Mr. St. Paul. He had never visited Minola before, nor was she even aware that he knew where she lived. She was surprised, but she did not know of any reason why she might not see him. She hastened down to her sitting-room, and there she found Mr. St. Paul, as she had found Mr. Blanchet once before. Mr. St. Paul looked even a stranger figure in her room than Mr. Blanchet had done, she thought. He seemed far too tall for the place, and had a heedless, lounging, half-swaggering way, which appeared as if it were compounded of the old manner of the cavalry man and the newer habits of the Western hunter. Nothing, however, could have been more easy, confident, and self-possessed than the way in which he came forward to greet Minola. If he had been visiting her every day for a month before, he could not have been more friendly and at his ease.

"How d'ye do, Miss Grey? Just in time to see you, I suppose, before you go? I've been down to Keeton already. I'm going down again—I mean to make my mark there somehow."

Minola thought, with a certain half-amused, half-abashed feeling, of the remarks she had heard concerning herself and Mr. St. Paul, but she did not show any embarrassment in her manner. Indeed, Mr. St. Paul was not a person to allow any one to feel much embarrassment in his presence. He was entirely easy, self-satisfied, and unaffected, and he had a way of pouring out his confidences as though he had known Minola from her birth upwards.

"I hope you found a pleasant reception there."

"Yes, well enough for that matter. I find my brother and his wife are not anything like so popular as I was given to understand that they were. I saw my brother in London—didn't I tell you?—before I went down to Keeton, you know."

"No, I did not know that you had seen him; I hope he was glad to see you, Mr. St. Paul?"

"Not he; I dare say he was very sorry I hadn't been wiped out by the Indians. Do you know what being wiped out means?"

"Yes, I think I could guess that much. I suppose it means being killed?"

"Of course. I mean to teach you all the slang of the West; I think a nice girl never looks so nice as when she is talking good expressive slang. Our British slang is all unmeaning stuff, you know; only consists in calling a thing by some short vulgar word—or some long and pompous word, the fun being in the pompousness; but the Western slang is a sort of picture-writing, don't you know?—a kind of compressed metaphor, answering the purposes of an intellectual pemmican or charqui. Do you know what these things are, Miss Grey?"

"Oh, yes; compressed meats of some kind, I suppose. But I don't think I care about slang very much."

"You may be sure you will when you get over the defects of your Keeton bringing-up. But what was I going to tell you? Let me see. Oh, yes, about my brother and his wife. The honest Keeton folks seem to have forgotten them. But I was speaking, too, about my going to see my brother in town. Oh, yes, I went to see him; he didn't want me, and he made no bones about letting me know it. He thinks I have disgraced the family; it was quite like the scene in the play—whose play is it?—I am sure I don't remember—where Lord Foppington's brother goes to see him, and is taken so coolly. I haven't read the play for more years than you have lived in the world, I dare say, but it all came back upon me in a moment. I felt like saying 'Good-bye, Foppington,' only that he would never have understood the allusion, and would think I meant to say he was a 'fop,' which he is not, bless him."

"Then your visit did not bring you any nearer to a reconciliation with your brother?"

"Not a bit of it—pushed us farther asunder, I think. The odd thing was that I told him I wanted nothing from him, and that I had made money enough for myself in the West. You would have thought that would have fetched him, wouldn't you? Not the least in life, I give you my word." And Mr. St. Paul laughed good-humouredly at the idea.

"I am sorry to hear it," said Minola. "I think there are quarrels and spites enough in the world, without brothers joining in with all the rest."

"Bad form, isn't it—don't you think? But I don't suppose in real life brothers and sisters ever do care much for each other—do you think they do? I haven't known any such cases; have you?"

Minola could not contribute much from her own family history to demonstrate the affection and devotion of brothers; but she had no idea of agreeing in the truth of Mr. St. Paul's philosophic reflections, for all that.

"I believe what you say is true enough as regards the brothers, but I can't admit it of the sisters."

"Come, now, you don't really believe that nonsense, I know."

"Believe what nonsense? That sisters may be fond of their brothers sometimes?"

"No, I don't mean that; but that there is any real difference between men and women in these ways—that men are all bad and women all good, and that sort of thing. One's as bad as the other, Miss Grey. When you have lived as long in the world as I have, you'll find it, I tell you. But I don't find much fault with either lot. I think they are both right enough, all things considered, don't you know?"

"I am sure Mary Blanchet is devoted to her brother," Miss Grey said warmly.

"That little old maid? Well, now, do you know, I shouldn't wonder. That's just the sort of woman to be devoted to a brother; and, of course, he doesn't care twopence about her."

"Oh, for shame!" said Minola, not, however, feeling quite satisfied about the strength of Herbert Blanchet's affection for his sister, even while she felt bound, for Mary's sake, to utter her protest against his being set down as wholly undeserving.

"But, I say," Mr. St. Paul observed, "what a fool he is! I don't think I ever saw a more conceited cad and idiot."

"He is a very particular friend of mine, Mr. St. Paul," Miss Grey began. "At least, his sister is one of my oldest friends."

"Yes, yes; just so. The good old spinster is a friend of yours, and you try to like the cad-brother on her account. All quite right, of course. I should say he was just the sort of fellow to borrow the poor old girl's money, if she had any."

"Oh, Mary has no money, and I am sure, if she had, she would be only too glad to give it to him."

"Very likely; anyhow, he would be only too glad to take it, you may be sure. But I don't want to say anything against your friends, Miss Grey, if you don't like it. Only women generally do like it, you know—and then, you may say anything you please, in your turn, against any of my friends or relatives. I shan't be offended one bit, I can assure you."

Minola had nothing to say, and therefore said nothing. Her new acquaintance did not allow any silence to spring up.

"Talking of friends," he said, "there is one of your friends who politely declines any helping hand of mine in the election business at Keeton, although I think I could do him a good turn with some of the fellows who are out of humour with my brother. Our Quixotic young friend will have none of the help of brothers who quarrel with brothers, it seems. Easy to see that he never had a brother."

"Mr. Heron is a man of very sensitive nature, I believe," Minola said; "he will not do anything that he does not think exactly right, Mr. Money says."

"Yes, so I hear. Odd, is it not? Heron always was a confounded young fool, you know. He got into all his difficulties by bothering about things that oughtn't to have concerned him one red cent. Well, he won't have my disinterested assistance. There again he is a fool, for I could have done something for him, and Money knows it—it was partly on Money's account that I thought of taking up Heron's side of the affair, because, so far as I am concerned, anybody else would do me just as well so long as he opposed my brother's man."

"I can quite understand that Mr. Heron would not allow himself to be made a mere instrument to work out your quarrel with your brother. I think he was quite right."

The good-humoured St. Paul laughed.

"All very fine, Miss Grey, and it does for a lady uncommonly well, no doubt; but, if you want to get into Parliament, it won't do to be quite so squeamish. I am sure I should be only too happy to get the help of Cain against Abel or Abel against Cain, if I could, in such a case."

"Most men would, I dare say," Minola answered, with as much severity as she could assume under the possible penalty of Mr. St. Paul's laughter. "But I am glad that there are some men, or that there is one man, at least, who thinks there is some object in life higher than that of getting into Parliament."

"Oh, as far as that goes, I quite agree with you, Miss Grey; I shouldn't care twopence myself about a seat in Parliament—a confounded bore, I think. But if you go in for playing a game, why, you ought to play it, you know."

"But are there not rules in every game? Are there not such things as fair and unfair?"

"Of course, yes; but I fancy the strong players generally make the rules to suit their own ideas in the end. Anyhow, I never heard of anyone playing at electioneering who would have hesitated for a moment about accepting the hand I offered to our Quixotic young friend."

"I am glad he is Quixotic," Minola said eagerly. "I like to think of a man who ventures to be a Quixote."

"Very sorry to hear it, Miss Grey, for I am afraid you won't like much to think about me. Yet, do you know, I came here to make a sort of Quixotic offer about this very election."

"I am glad to hear it; the more Quixotic it is, the more I shall like it. To whom is the offer to be made?—to Mr. Heron?"

"Oh, no, by Jove!—excuse me, Miss Grey—nothing of the sort. The offer is to be made to you."

"To me?" Minola was a little surprised, but she did not colour or show any surprise. She knew very well that it was not an offer of himself Mr. St. Paul was about to make, but it amused her to think of the interpretation Mary Blanchet, if she could have been present, would at once have put on his words.

"Yes, indeed, Miss Grey, to you. I have it in my power to make you returning-officer for Keeton. Do you understand what that means?"

"I know in a sort of way what a returning-officer is; but I don't at all understand how I can do his office."

"I'll show you. You shall have the fate of Keeton as much in your hands as if you owned the whole concern—a deuced deal more, in fact, than if you owned the whole concern in days of ballot like these. I believe you do own a good many of the houses there now, don't you?"

"I hardly know; but I know that, if I do, I wish I didn't."

"Very well; just you try what you can get out of your influence over your tenants—that's all."

"Then how am I to become returning-officer for Keeton?"

"That's quite another thing. That depends on me."

"On you, Mr. St. Paul?"

"On me. Just listen." St. Paul had been seated in his favourite attitude of careless indolence in a very low chair, so low that his long legs seemed as if they stretched half-way across the room. His position, joined with an expression of self-satisfied lawlessness in his face, might have whimsically suggested a sort of resemblance to Milton's arch-fiend "stretched out huge at length," in one of his less malign humours. He now jumped up and stood on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fireplace, his slightly stooping shoulders only seeming to make him look taller than otherwise, because they might set people wondering as to the height he would have reached if he had only stood erect and made the most of his inches. His blue eyes had quite a sparkle of excited interest in them, and his prematurely bald forehead looked oddly infantine over these eyes and that keen, fearless mouth.

"Look here, Miss Grey, it's all in your hands. You know both these fellows, don't you?"

"Both what fellows?"

"These fellows who want to get in for Keeton. You know them both. Now, which of them do you want to win?"

"What can it matter which way my wishes go—if they went any way?"

"How like a woman! how very like a woman!" and he laughed.

"What is like a woman? I know when a man says anything is like a woman, he means to say that it is ridiculous."

"Well, that's true enough; that is about what we do mean in most cases. What I meant in this case was only that you would not answer my question. I put a plain direct question, to which you must have some answer to give, and you only asked me a question in return which had nothing to do with mine."

"Perhaps I have no answer to give. I may have the answer in my own mind, and yet not have it to give to anyone else."

"Oh, but you may really give it to me!—in strictest confidence, I assure you; no living soul shall ever know from me. Come, Miss Grey, let me know the truth. It can't possibly do you any harm—or anybody harm, for that matter, except the wrong man—for I take it for granted that the man you don't favour must be the wrong man."

"But I don't know that I ought to have anything to do with such a matter——"

"Never mind these scruples; it's nothing; there's to be no treason in the business, nor any unfair play. It's only this: I couldn't get in for the borough myself, even if I tried my best, but I can send in the one of the two whom I prefer—or, in this case, whom you prefer. I can do this as certainly as anything in this uncertain world can be certain."

"But how could that be?"

"*That* it would not suit me to tell you just at present. I know a safe way, that's all. In the teeth of the ballot I can promise you that. Now, Miss Grey, who is to have the seat?"

"Are you really serious in all this, Mr. St. Paul?"

"As serious as I ever was in my life about anything—a good deal more serious, I dare say, than I often was about graver things and more important men. Now then, Miss Grey, which of these two fellows is to sit for Keeton?"

"But why do you make this offer to me?" she asked, with some hesitation. "What have I to do with it?" There was something alarming to her in his odd proposition, about which he was evidently quite serious now.

"Why do I make the offer to you? Well, because I should like to please you, because you are a sort of woman I like—a regular good girl, I think, without any nonsense or affectation about you. Now, that's the whole reason why I offer this to you. I don't care much myself either way, except to annoy my brother, and that can be done in fifty other ways without half the trouble to me. I was inclined to draw out of the whole affair until I remembered that you knew both the fellows, and I thought you might have a wish for one of them to go in in preference to the other—they can't both go in, you see—and so I made up my mind to give you the chance of saying which it should be. Now then, Miss Grey, name your man."

He put his hands into his pockets and coolly waited for an answer. He had not the appearance of being in the least amused at her perplexity. He took the whole affair in a calm, matter-of-fact way, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Minola was perplexed. She did not see what right he could have to control the coming contest in any way, and still less what right she could have to influence him in doing so. The dilemma was one in which no previous experience could well guide her. She much wished she had Mr. Money at hand to give her a word of counsel.

"Come, Miss Grey, make up your mind—or rather, tell me what you have already made up your mind to, for I am sure you have not been waiting until now to form an opinion. Which of these two men do you want to see in Parliament?"

There did not seem any particular reason why Minola or any girl might not say in plain words which of two candidates she would rather see successful.

Mr. St. Paul appeared to understand her difficulty, for he said in an encouraging way—

"After all, you know, if you had women's rights and all that sort of thing you would have to give your vote for one or other of these fellows, and I dare say you would be expected to take the stump for your favourite candidate. So there really can't be any very serious objection to your telling me in confidence which of the two you want to win."

Minola could not see how there could be any objection on any moral principle she could think of just then—being in truth a little confused and puzzled—to her giving a voice to the wish she had formed about the election.

"It's not the speaking out of my wish that gives me any doubt," she said; "it is the condition under which you want me to speak. I seem to be doing something that I have no right to do; that is, Mr. St. Paul, if you are serious."

"I remember reading, long ago," he said, "some Arabian Nights' story, or something of the kind, about a king, I think it was, who was brought at night to some mysterious place and told to cut a rope there, and that something or other would happen, he did not know what or when. The thing seemed very simple, and yet he didn't quite like to do it without knowing why and how and all about it. It strikes me that you seem to be in the same sort of fix."

"So I am; just the same. Why can't you tell me what you are going to do?"

"I like that! That is my secret for the present."

"And your king—the king in your story—did he cut the rope at last?"

"I am afraid I have forgotten that; but I have no doubt he did, for he was a reasonable sort of creature, being a man, and I know that everything came right with him in the end."

"Very well; I accept the omen of your king, and I too will cut the rope without asking why. Of course I wish that Mr. Heron should be elected. He is a Liberal in politics. Why do you laugh when I say that, Mr. St. Paul?"

"Well, I didn't know that you cared much for that sort of thing; and women are generally supposed to be reactionaries all the world over, are they not? Well, anyhow, that's one reason, his being a Liberal. What next?"

"I don't know that any next is wanting. But of course I think Mr. Heron is a much cleverer man, and is likely to be much better able to get on in the House of Commons; and then he has his complaint to make against the Government——"

"Yes; and then?"

"Then, he is very much liked by people whom I like—and I like him very much myself." Minola spoke out with perfect frankness, believing that that was the best thing she could do, and not showing the least sign of embarrassment.

Mr. St. Paul laughed.

"You don't like the other fellow so well?" he said.

"I am sure he is a very good man——"

"That's enough; you need not say another word. We all can tell what a critic means when he speaks of some actor as a careful and painstaking performer. It's just the same when a woman says a man is very good. Then you pronounce for Heron?"

"I pronounce for Mr. Heron decidedly, if you call saying what I should like to happen pronouncing for anyone."

"In this case it is of more effect than many other pronunciamentos. You have elected Heron, Miss Grey, if I am not much more out in my calculations than I have been this some time. All right, I am satisfied. If you have money to throw away, just back what's-his-name?—Sheppard—heavily, and you are sure to get rid of it."

"And you won't tell me what all this means?"

"Not I, indeed; not likely. Good-day, Miss Grey; you have elected your friend Heron, I can tell you. Odd, isn't it, that he should come to be elected after all by me?"

He bade her good-day again, and strode and shambled out of the room and down stairs, leaving Minola much perplexed and not quite pleased, and yet full of a secret wonder and pride at the possibility of her having helped to do Mr. Heron a service.

"I wonder what he would say if he knew of it?" she asked herself, and she could hardly think that he would be greatly delighted with the promise of such influence.

## CHAPTER XX.

### LOVE AND ELECTIONEERING.

THE soul of Keeton, as a local orator expressed it, was stirred to its depths by the events which succeeded. The three estates of the town, whereof we have already spoken, were alike concerned in the election. Had it never occurred, there would have been enough in the death of Mrs. Saulsbury and the rearrangement of Mr. Grey's property to keep conversation up among the middle grade of Keeton folks. But business like that would not interest the park, and of course it had no interest for the working class of the town. The election, on the contrary, was of equal concern to park, semi-detached villa, and cottage, or even garret. A contest in Keeton was an absolute novelty so far as the memory of living man could go back.

It may perhaps be said that the opinion of the class who alone concerned themselves about her affairs had been on the whole decidedly unfavourable to Minola. She had gone as a sort of rebel against legitimate authority out of Keeton, and had flung herself into the giddy vortex of London life. No one well knew what had become of her; and that with Keeton folks was another way of saying that she must have rushed upon destruction. Some persons held that she must have gone upon the stage. This idea became almost a certainty when a Keeton man, being in London on business, brought back with him from town a play-bill announcing a new *opera bouffe* in which one of the minor performers was named "Miss Mattie Grey." If the good Keeton man had only looked in a few other play-bills he would have no doubt found Greys in abundance—Matties, Minnies, Nellies, and such-like; Grey being rather a favourite name with young ladies in the profession. But he made no such investigation, and it was at once assumed that Mattie Grey was Minola Grey in disguise—a disguise as subtle as that of the famous knight, Sir Tristram, who, when he wanted to conceal his identity from all observers and place himself beyond all possibility of detection, called himself Sir Tramtrist.

When, however, it was found that Minola was to have her father's property after all, a certain change took place in the opinion of most persons who concerned themselves about the matter. It was assumed generally that Mr. Grey was far too good and Christian a man to have left his property to a girl who could be capable of acting in an *opera bouffe.* Then, when Miss Grey in person came to the town in the company of so distinguished a man as Mr. Money, even gossip started repentant at the sound itself had made, and began to deny that it had ever made any sound at all. Mr. Money was a sort of hero among the middle class everywhere. He was known to have fought his way up in life, and to be now very rich; and when Miss Grey came into the town in the company of Mr. Money and his daughter, the report went about forthwith that Minola Grey had got into the very best society in London, and that she was going to marry the eldest son of Mr. Money, and to be presented at Court.

Mr. Money had taken a couple of floors of the best hotel to begin with. He had brought his carriage with him—a carriage in which he was hardly ever known to take a seat when in town. He had brought a sort of retinue of servants. He went deliberately about making what Mr. St. Paul would have called "a splurge." Mr. Money knew his Pappenheimers. He knew that he was well known to have sprung from nothing, but he also knew that the middle and lower classes of Keeton would have given him little thanks if he had tried to please them by exhibiting there a modesty becoming his modest origin. He knew well enough that the more he put on display, the more they would think of him and of his clients. Therefore he put on display like a garment—a garment to which he was little used, and in which he took no manner of delight. There was generally a little group of persons round the hotel doors at all hours of the day waiting to see Mr. Money and his friends go out or come in. At first Minola positively declined to go out at all, except at night; and the recent death of her father's widow gave her a fair excuse for remaining quietly indoors. Lucy delighted in the whole affair, and often declared that she felt as if she had been turned into a princess. When Mr. Heron came down, he too seemed rather to enjoy it. At least, he took it all as a matter of course. The experiences of colonial days, when the ruler of a colony, however small it may be, is a person of majestic proportions in his own sphere, enabled him to take Mr. Money's pomp quite seriously.

Meanwhile Mr. Augustus Sheppard had got his committee-rooms and his displays of various kinds, and was understood to be working hard. The election contest, so long looked for, had taken everyone a little by surprise when it showed itself so near. It was natural that Mr. Sheppard and his friends should feel confident of the result. The retiring representative was now an old man. He had faithfully served out his time; he had always voted as his patrons wished him to do; he had never made a speech in the House of Commons; he had never indeed risen to his feet there at all, except once or twice to present a petition. The delights of a parliamentary career were, therefore, this long time beginning to pall upon him. He had been notoriously anxious to get out of Parliament. He had been sent into the House of Commons by the late duke to keep the seat warm until the present duke should come of age. But the present duke succeeded to the peerage before he came of age, and therefore never had a chance of sitting in the House of Commons. The man in possession was allowed to remain there through years and years until the present duke could be induced to return from abroad and take some interest in the political and other affairs of Keeton. His own son was yet too young for Parliament, and as the sitting member found himself getting too old, and begged for release, there was nothing better to do than to get some safe and docile person to take on him the representation of the borough for some time to come. Those who knew Keeton could recommend no one more fitting in every desirable way than Mr. Augustus Sheppard.

The time was when Mr. Sheppard would only have had to present the orders of the reigning duke to the constituency of Keeton and to take his seat in the House of Commons accordingly as if by virtue of a sovereign patent in ancient days. But times had changed even in sleepy Keeton. The younger generation had almost forgotten their dukes, it was so long since a chief of the house had been among them. Even the women had grown comparatively indifferent to the influence of the name, seeing that it had so long been only a name for them. There had been for many years no duchesses and their lady daughters to meet at flower-shows and charitable bazaars. by the delight of whose face, and the sound of whose feet, and the wind of whose tresses, as the poet has it, they could be made to feel happy and exalted. There once were brighter days, when the coming and going of the ladies at the Castle gave the women of Keeton a perpetual subject of talk, of thought, of hope, and of quarrel. Some of the readers of this story may perhaps have spent a little time in small towns on the banks of foreign—say of American—rivers which have a habit of freezing up as winter comes, and becoming useless for navigation—in fact, being converted from rivers into great frozen roads, until spring unlocks the flowers and the streams again. Such travellers must have noticed what an unfailing topic of conversation such a river supplies to those who dwell on its banks. How soon will it freeze this season? On what precise day was it closed to navigation last year—the year before—the year before that? In what year did it freeze soonest? Do you remember that particular year when it froze so very soon, or did not freeze for such an unprecedented length of time? That was the same year that—no, not that year; it was that other year, don't you remember? Then follow contradictions and disputes, and the elders always remember the river having been regularly in the habit of performing some feat which now it never cares to repeat. The time of the frost melting and the river becoming really a river again is a matter just as fruitful of discussion. The stranger is often tempted to wonder what the people of that place would have to talk about at all if suddenly the river were to give up its trick of freezing, and were to remain always as fluent as our own monotonous Thames. There seems to him some reason to fear that the tongues of the people would become frozen as the river ceased to freeze.

Like the freezing and the melting of their river to those who lived on its banks, was the annual visit of the ladies of the ducal family to the womankind of Keeton in Keeton's brighter days. Girls were growing up there now who had never seen a duchess. The arrival, the length of stay, the probable time of departure, the appearances in public, whether more or less frequent than this time last year, the dresses worn by the gracious ladies, the persons spoken to by them, the persons only bowed to, the unhappy creatures who got neither speech nor salutation—it is a fact that there was a generation of women growing up in Keeton with whom these and such questions had never formed any part of the interest of their lives. They could not be expected to take much interest all at once and as it were by instinct in the political cause of the ducal family.

There was therefore a good deal of uncertainty about the conditions of the problem. The followers of the ducal family were some of them full of hope. The reappearance of a duke and duchess, and their train, might do wonders in restoring the old order of things. In Keeton petticoat influence counted for a great deal, and in other days those who had the promises of the wives hardly thought it worth while to go through the form of asking the husbands. But now there was a new condition of the political problem even in that respect. The ballot, which had made the voter independent of the influence of his landlord or his wealthy customer, had converted the power of the petticoat into a sort of unknown quantity. There could be little doubt that the moral influence and the traditional control would still prevail with some; but he must be a rash electioneering agent who would venture to say how many votes could thus be counted on. It is a remarkable tribute to the moral greatness of an aristocracy, that the influence thus obtained in old days over the wives and daughters of Keeton was absolutely unearned by any overt acts of favour or conciliation. The later dukes and their families had always been remarkable for never making any advances towards the townspeople. None of the traders of the town, however wealthy and respectable, found themselves or their wives invited to any manner of festivity up at the ducal hall. All that the noble family ever did for the townspeople was to come at certain seasons to Keeton and allow themselves to be looked at. This was enough for the time. The illustrious ladies could be seen, and, as has been said, they did sometimes speak a word to favoured and envied persons. They were loved for being great personages, not for anything they did to win such devotion. "Love is enough," says the poet.

All these considerations, however, rendered it hard to calculate the exact chances of opposition in the borough of Keeton. Of course revolutionary opinions were growing up, old people found, there as well as elsewhere. There was a new class of Conservatives springing up whom steady, old-fashioned politicians found it not easy to distinguish from the Radicals of their younger days. On the other hand, keensighted persons could not fail to perceive that, whereas in their youth almost all young men had a tendency to be or to fancy themselves Radicals, it was now growing rather the fashion for immature politicians to boast themselves Tories, and to talk of a spirited foreign policy and the dangers of Cosmopolitanism. It would be hard to say how things might turn out, knowing people thought, as they shook their heads, and hoped the expected contest might not come on for some time.

Now the contest was at hand. At least, the sitting member had positively declared that he would sit no longer, and it was announced that the duke was coming to Keeton, and that Mr. Augustus Sheppard was to be the duke's candidate. No more striking proof could be given of the recent change in the political condition of Keeton, than is found in the fact that the adoption of Mr. Sheppard as a candidate by the ducal family did not even to the most devoted and sanguine followers of the great house make Mr. Sheppard's election seem by any means a matter of absolute certainty. There was a tolerably strong conviction everywhere, long before any opposition was announced, that the duke's candidate would not be allowed to walk over the course and right into the House of Commons this time. Nobody in the town would oppose the duke, very likely, but the man to oppose would come.

Now the man actually had come. Victor Heron had issued his address, and was in Keeton. His address was original; he had positively refused from the first to make any grand professions of superior statesmanship or patriotism. He would tell Englishmen, he said, that he was seeking a seat in Parliament as a way of getting redress for a great wrong done to him, and through him to some of the principles most dear to the country. When he had fought his battle in Parliament, and won or lost, he promised that he would then place himself in the hands of his constituents and resign the seat if they desired. The whole address was frank, odd, original, and perhaps seemed a little self-conceited. The author's absorption in his subject was mistaken by many people, as will happen sometimes, for self-conceit.

Mr. Sheppard's address, on the contrary, talked only of the good old Conservative principles which had made England the envy and admiration of all surrounding States; of the local interests of Keeton, and the candidate's acquaintance therewith; and of the many splendid things done for the town by the noble family who had done it the honour to have a park there.

"I don't think Heron's address reads half badly," Mr. Money said, one evening in the absence of Heron, to his two companions; "on the whole, I shouldn't wonder if it took some people, the women particularly. Anything personal, anything in the nature of a grievance, is likely to have a good effect on many people, especially where the injured personage is young, and good-looking, and plucky. I wish the women had the votes here just for this once, for I think we should stand to win if they had."

"Then, papa, do you think we shan't win now?" Lucy asked.

Minola looked up eagerly for his answer.

"Well, Lucelet, I don't like to say; I am not quite charmed with the look of things. I find there are a good many very strong Radicals grown up in this place since there was a contest here before; and Heron's not wild enough for them by half. They are a little of the red-hot-social-revolution sort of thing—the *prolétaire* business, with a dash of the brabbling atheist—the fellows who think one is not fit to live if he even admits the possibility of another world. I am afraid these fellows will hold aloof from us altogether, or even take some whim of voting against us, and they may be strong enough to turn the scale."

Minola hoped that if her friend Mr. St. Paul had really any charm by which to extort victory for Heron as he had promised he would not forget to use it in good time. But she began to have less faith, and less, in the possibility of any such feat. She was a little in the perplexed condition of some one of mediæval times, who has entered into a bargain for supernatural interference, and is not quite certain whether to wish that the compact may be really carried out or that it may prove to have been only the figment of a dream.

"I'm told we ought to have some poems done," Money went on to say. "Not merely squibs, you know, but appeals about right and justice, and the cause of oppressed humanity, and all that."

"I'm sure Minola could do some beautifully!" Lucy exclaimed, looking beseechingly towards her friend.

"Oh, no; I couldn't indeed! My appeals would be dreadfully weak; they could not rouse the spirits of any mortal creature. Now, if we only had Mary Blanchet!"

This, it must be owned, was Minola's fun, but it gave an idea to Mr. Money.

"Tell you what," he said, "we ought to have her brother—the bard, you used to call him, Lucelet."

"Oh, no, papa; indeed I never called him anything of the kind. I never did, indeed, Nola."

"Well, whatever you called him, Lucelet, we can't do better than to have him. We'll put Pegasus into harness, by Jove—a capital good use to make of him too! I'll write to what's-his-name?—Blanchet—at once."

"But I don't think he would like it, papa; I think he would take offence at the idea of your asking him to do poems for an election. I don't think he would come."

"Oh, yes, he would come! we would make it worth his while. These young fellows give themselves airs, to make you girls admire them, that they never think of trying on with men. It would be a rather telling thing here, too, if it got about that we had brought a real poet specially down from London. I'll write at once."

This seemed rather alarming to Minola.

"I doubt whether Mr. Heron would much like it," she pleaded. "I don't know whether they are such very good friends just now—I am rather afraid."

"Oh, yes; of course they must be good friends! Heron is not to have it all his own way in everything, anyhow. He must like the idea ; he shall. I'll write without telling him anything about it, and Heron couldn't help being friendly to any fellow who came under his roof, as one might say."

No one made any further objection.

"I wish Heron had not been so confoundedly particular about St. Paul," Mr. Money went on to say in a discontented tone. "That was absurd. St. Paul's no worse than lots of other fellows, and in such a thing as this we can't afford to throw away any offer of support. We have to fight against the duke and his lot anyhow, and the help of St. Paul couldn't have done us any harm in that quarter, and it might have done us some good in others. I shouldn't wonder if St. Paul had some friends and admirers here still ; and it is as likely as not that his being with us might conciliate a few of the mad Radicals. They might like him just because he is against his brother, the duke."

"But Mr. Heron would not have such help as that," Lucy said, in tones of pride.

"Oh, by Jove! if you want to carry an election——and now, I suppose, if St. Paul has any influence at all, it will be given against us."

Minola thought of her unholy compact, and did not venture to say a word on the subject.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AN EPISODE.

That was an odd and, on the whole, a wondrous pleasant time. In all her mental trouble and perplexity Minola could not help enjoying it. It was like a great holiday—like some extravagant kind of masquerading or private theatricals. It was impossible that one's spirits could go down, or at least that they could remain long down, under such circumstances. Life was a perpetual rattle and excitement ; and the company was full of mirth. Even Victor Heron himself, for all his earnestness, went on as if the whole affair were some enormous joke. Electioneering appeared to be the best sort of pastime devisable. They all sat up until the morning concocting appeals to the electors, addresses to this or that interest supposed to be affected, attacks on the opposite party —not however on Mr. Sheppard personally—squibs about the Tories, denunciations of the Ministry, exhortations to the women of Keeton, the mothers of Keeton, the daughters of Keeton, and every class in and about Keeton who could be regarded as in the least degree open to the impulses of national or patriotic feeling. Some of these appeals had to be prepared in the absence and without the knowledge of the candidate whom they were intended to serve. Heron was so sensitive about what he considered fair play, that he was inclined as far as he could to restrain rather unduly even the good spirits of his chief supporters, and not to allow them to deal half as freely as they could have wished in the weapons of sarcasm and ridicule. Minola was developing quite a remarkable capacity for political satire, and Lucy Money was indefatigable at copying documents. There were meetings held day and night, and Victor sometimes made a dozen speeches in the course of a single afternoon.

Scarcely less eloquent did Mr. Money prove himself to be. He never failed when called upon to stand up anywhere and recount the misdeeds of the Ministry, and the crimes generally of the aristocracy of Britain, in language which went to the very hearts of his hearers; and he had a rough telling humour which kept his audience amused in the midst of all the horrors that his description of the country's possible ruin might have brought up before their minds. Mr. Money took the middle-aged electors immensely; but there could be little doubt that the suffrages of the women, if they had had any, would have been given freely in favour of the eloquence and the candidature of Victor Heron.

Sometimes it was delightful when a night came, after all the meetings and speech-makings were over—and it happened by strange chance that there was nothing more to do in the way of electioneering just then; for then the little party of friends would shut themselves up in their drawing-room, and chat and laugh, and sing and play on the piano, and make jokes, and discuss all manner of odd and fantastic questions, until long after prudence ought to have commended sleep. Minola sang whenever anybody asked her, although she never sang for listeners in London; and she sang, if she could, whatever her audience wished to hear. Lucy played and sang very prettily too. Victor Heron had picked up in his colonial experiences and his wanderings about the world many sweet, wild, untutored songs of savage and semi-savage races and tribes, and he sang them with a dramatic skill and force for which none of his hearers had ever before given him credit. The little company seemed in fact to be entering into a condition of something like wild simplicity and frankness, when all the affectations of civilisation were let fall, and each did everything he could to the best effect, unconcerned by forms or by critics.

To Lucy in especial all this was delightful. It was not an effort to her to throw herself into the spirit of the enjoyment as it was to Minola. To her the happiness of the present had no alloy. Over the passing hours there were no present clouds. In the whole world the two persons she most admired were Victor Heron and her father; and these two were the heroes of the occasion, seeming to have the eyes of the world on them, and to be the admired of all as orators and statesmen. To hear them address cheering crowds brought tears of pride and delight into the eyes of the kind little maid. She was glorious in their glory; their successes were hers. Then she had Minola too always with her, and they were all together, and walled off from the world into a little commonwealth of their own, and had nothing to do but to be great politicians all day, and listen to splendid speeches, and at night retire as it were into their tent, and be musical and joyous, and full of glorious hope. It was all a dream of love and pride to the gentle little Lucelet.

More than once—ah! more than twenty times—did Lucy tell Minola that her father had taken her to the House of Commons, and that she had often heard all the good speakers, and that she had never heard one who could in her estimation compare with Mr. Heron. She had heard Gladstone; "and, of course, he was very good—oh, yes, very good indeed!—but if you had heard him, Nola dear, you would say with me that he is not to be compared to Mr. Heron." She had heard Mr. Disraeli too—"oh, yes, many times, and he was very clever!" she quite admitted that, "and he made people laugh a great deal;" and she had heard Mr. Bright, whom her papa always considered the best speaker of all—"but wait until you hear them, Nola—and you shall hear them all, darling—and you will say yourself that none of them is like Mr. Heron. I don't know what it is, but there is something about Mr. Heron that none of them seems to have—at least, to my mind, Nola dear."

Indeed, Nola knew well enough that there was for Lucy a charm in the eloquence of Mr. Heron which Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright would have vainly tried to rival. For herself, although she may be supposed to have been under the same influence as Lucy, she did not rate the eloquence of Mr. Heron quite so highly. The charm in her case did not work in just the same way. She listened with a certain admiration and surprise to the vivacious, earnest, and often highly impassioned speeches that Victor Heron threw off daily by the dozen, and she recognised with sincere delight the genuine freshness and force that were in them, and thought them a great deal better than she had expected to hear; but she would not have had the least difficulty in admitting that Mr.

Gladstone and Mr. Bright were probably much finer speakers than Mr. Heron; and, without having heard either of these orators, she was already quite prepared to consider their eloquence as higher in order than his. What concerned her far more was that she saw nothing in Victor Heron that did not compel her to hold to or to increase the opinion she had already formed of his manly and unselfish character. She had hoped in a strange, reluctant way that, while seeing so much of him as she must needs do during their stay in Keeton, she might see in him, not indeed anything to lower her opinion of his courage, and truthfulness, and manhood, but some little weaknesses or affectations which, harmless in themselves, might lower him in her mind from his place, and give her relief and rest. Yes, she had in her secret heart sometimes longed passionately and despairingly to be able thus to dethrone him from her heart, and to see him as a young man like another. She was suffering so much from the part which she had imposed on herself and was determined to play, that she would have welcomed relief even at the cost of the overturning of her idol. There were times when she almost wished she were able to hate him or to despise him, but she could do neither. The more she saw of him, the more she was compelled to see that, under that exterior of almost boyish impulsiveness and restless energy, there were only too many of the qualities which she held to be especially heroic. He was so frank and simple, and yet so clever; so full of courage, and yet so modest; so strong, and yet so sweet and gentle. He would not flatter Neptune for his trident, she thought, nor Jove for his power to thunder. But there is many a man as good as Coriolanus in that, who, like Coriolanus, would brag, and bully, and be coarsely haughty; and Mr. Heron could do nothing like that. To her he seemed all kindness and frank, simple sweetness, and she could not dethrone him from his place in her heart.

Perhaps we may well ask ourselves whether the clever and sarcastic Minola was not, after all, as extravagant a hero-worshipper as little Lucelet? Is it, to say the least, not quite possible that when Lucy believed Victor Heron to be as fine a speaker as Demosthenes, she was only exaggerating his merits in one way as much as Minola was exaggerating them in another? Is it likely that he was by any means that pure and perfect hero, all strength, and truth, and nobleness, that Minola was resolved to believe him? To many of us, perhaps, if we had known him, he might have seemed a clever, agreeable, honest, but rather simple and impracticable young man, and nothing more. We might have probed his character with the most impartial and even benevolent purpose, hoping to find there our ideal type of manhood, and honestly found ourselves unable to see anything of the kind in him. But it may be, too, that Minola really did see what we failed to see, and that she had got with her love, not a dazzled sight, but *clairvoyance.* You cannot make a touchstone of every pebble. The other pebbles may do their honest best, and give their judgment, and be wrong.

This, however, we shall not be able to decide. It has already been said in favour of the impartiality of Minola's judgment that at least she had done her best to prove it a mistake, and had to ratify it against her will. But, right or wrong, it affected her all the same. Every day that she passed in Keeton under these peculiar circumstances only added to the strength of the feelings which oppressed her, and against which she fought her fight in vain.

"I do wish this election would last for ever, Nola dear," Lucy said, with a sigh of mingled pleasure and fear. "I never liked any part of my life half so well."

There was, it must be owned, a great deal of pleasure in it for Minola as well. The pleasure was a fearful joy, and was mixed up with very acute pain; still, the exhilaration and the delight were there. All the time there was a feeling that she was not only working with Victor Heron, but for him. It is true that the time had many bitter moments; it is true also that not for years had her spirits risen so often to so high a point.

That was, for instance, a delightful night when they all went out to the park, and rambled about there, and looked at the great mausoleum. It was near midnight when they set out, for it was well-nigh impossible for them to get any time to themselves at any earlier hour. The great gates of the park were closed long before that time; but Minola knew of a little stile at one of the boundaries of the park, through which they might easily enter, and this gave quite a romantic air of trespassing and law-breaking to the whole escapade, which much enhanced its charm. The duke and his family had not come to the place, but were expected every day, and there was something rather piquant in the notion of thus trespassing on the lands of their political enemy. Mr. Money was much amused at the idea of their all being arrested as trespassers—perhaps even as robbers—and brought before some country justice, who might take it into his head to render a service to the duke and Mr. Sheppard by committing them to prison. They were all in the highest spirits.

The night was one to inspirit any heart. It was soft and warm, with a pale, poetic crescent moon just showing itself over the park trees, and a planet of shining silver just beneath the crescent of the moon, looking like the emblem of the Ottoman done in light upon the sky. There was something fantastic, poetic, and a little uncanny about this half-moon with the planet just within the enclosure of her bow.

"Can anything be more beautiful?" Minola asked aloud, and in her heart she thought, "I ought to be very happy and very thankful. When last I was here, how lonely I was!—I had hardly a friend; and now, what good, kind friends I have, whom I love, and who, I believe, are really fond of me. How ungrateful I should be if I were to repine because I have not everything that an idle fancy makes me ask for!" The whole influence of the place, the hour, the conditions entered into her soul, and made her think life very sweet and gracious then.

They were standing near the steps of the mausoleum.

"Now," said Lucy, "there is one thing I should so like just at this moment; it would be delightful."

"Well, Lucelet, what is it?" her father asked. "Is it to have several hairs of the duke's beard? Perhaps Mr. Heron will pledge himself to get them if you only ask him prettily."

"Papa, dear, what nonsense!" Lucy was not acquainted with the adventures of Sir Huon of Bordeaux. "No; I only want Nola to sing for us just here. It would be delightful in this air and at this spot."

"Don't know that it would do Miss Grey's voice much good to be exerted at midnight in the open air, Lucelet."

"It couldn't do it any particular harm," Minola said, only too happy in her present mood to have a chance of pleasing anybody. "My voice is not good enough to get any harm. I am only afraid that you may not be able to hear me."

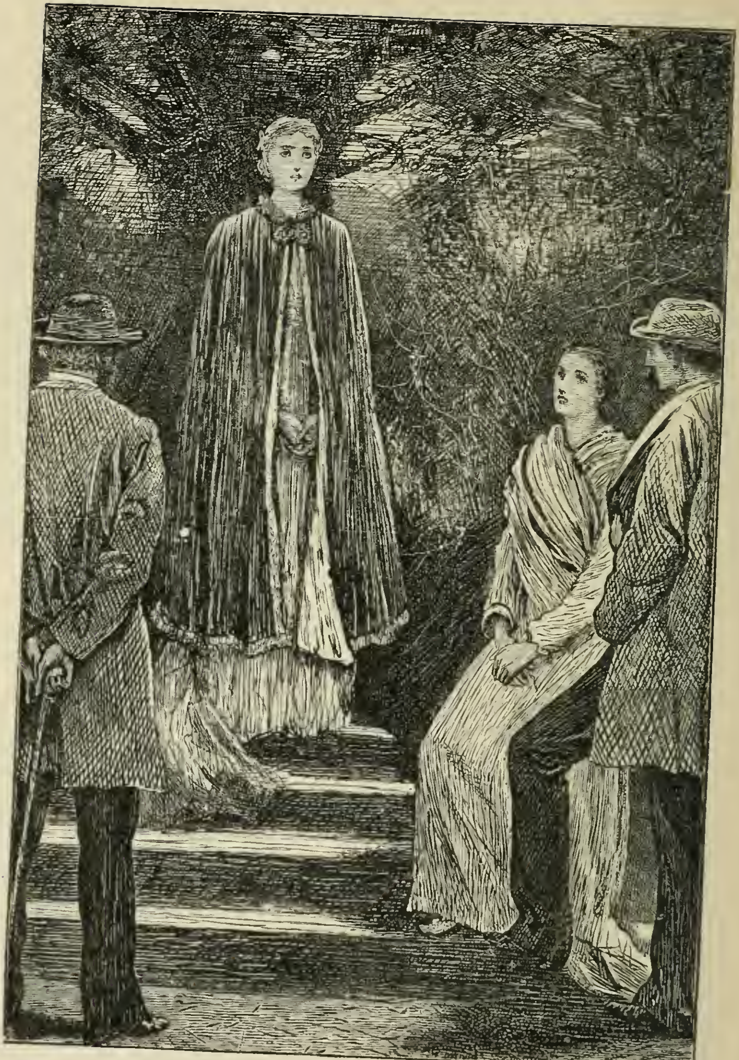
"We'll come close around you and make a ring, so far as our numbers will allow us," Victor said.

Minola mounted the steps of the mausoleum to get some advantage over her audience, as her voice was not strong, and they stood below, not in a ring, but in a row.

"What shall I sing?" she asked.

Of course she was only besought to sing any song she pleased; so, rather than keep them waiting and make herself appear as if she were attaching too much value to a trifle, she sang at once the first song that came into her mind. It was the story of the luckless lover of Barbara Allen.

Minola's voice was singularly fresh, pure, and sweet. It wanted strength, and would have sounded to little advantage in a concert room. It had some exquisite shades, if we may use such an expression, which would have been lost altogether in a great hall and on an ordinary audience. Minola, conscious of the lack of strength



"She looks like Corinne."

in her voice, and yet compelled by her dramatic instincts to seek for the fullest expression even when she only sang to please herself, had tried to make her singing obey her feelings and her perception of poetical meaning by giving its fullest value to every syllable and every tone. The songs she sang seemed to have much more in them than as they were sung by anyone else. New meanings and shades of meaning appeared to come out as the words came from her lips. But it required appreciative listeners to get at the genuine beauty of her singing; and the listeners must not be far away from the singer, or, no matter how appreciative, they must lose much of the effect. In the open air her voice would usually have failed to impress one; but this night the air was so pure and clear and soft, and the whole place was so silent, that the voice seemed made for the place, the hour, and the atmosphere; and the voice, indeed, became to the ears of some of the audience as if it were a part of the scene, an essential condition of its charm. As the song went on, the listeners found themselves drawn on to ascend the first step of the mausoleum, that they might not lose a syllable of the sweet, sad, old-fashioned story thus tenderly and sympathetically told.

The song was over. No one said a word directly in its praise. For a moment, indeed, there was silence.

"I wish she would not come down from the steps just yet," said Lucy. "Stay a moment, Nola dear; we shall ask you to sing something else if you will. I do like to see her standing there," she explained to her father and Heron; "she looks like Corinne."

They asked her to sing something else, and of course she was only too glad to please them. This time she chose a little ballad of Walter Scott's, to be found in "The Pirate," of which in her young days of romance Minola used to be fond. This song she had put of her own conceit to the music of a little-known folk-song of the border, which seemed to her to suit its spirit and words. It is the ballad which gives the betrayed lover's farewell to the "wild ferry which Hacon could brave, when the peaks of the skerry were white with the wave," and to the maid who "may look over those wild waves in vain for the skiff of her lover, he comes not again." For the broken vows, the maiden may fling them on the wild current, and the mermaiden may sing them. "New sweetness they'll give her bewildering strain; there is one who will never believe them again." If Minola had really been a betrayed lover, she could not have expressed more simply and more movingly the proud passion of a broken heart. As Lucy's face was upturned in the moonlight, Victor saw that her eyes were swimming in tears. He was greatly charmed and touched by her sensitiveness, and felt drawn to her in an unusual way. He turned his eyes away, fearing she might know that he had seen her tears.

Minola came down from the steps silently. As yet, no one had thanked her or said her songs gave pleasure; but Minola felt that she had pleased them, and that they liked her to sing, and for the time she was happy. If she could have known that her song had brought Victor Heron nearer in feeling than ever he was before to her friend Lucy, she would perhaps have felt an added although a rather melancholy pleasure in the power of her song. Certainly the sensation that passed through Victor's breast as he heard the last lines of the song, and looked on Lucy's face, and saw the sparkling tears in her eyes, was something new to him, and in itself no poor tribute to the influence of the music.

Mr. Money was the first to speak.

"Your way of singing, Miss Grey, reminds me of what I once heard a very clever man say of the reading of Shakespeare's sonnets. He said he never heard them properly read except by a man who was dying, like your friend the lover of Barbara Allen, and who could hardly speak above his breath."

"My dear papa, what a compliment to Nola!" the astonished Lucy exclaimed.

"You don't understand it, Lucelet—Miss Grey does, I am sure, and I hope Heron does, although I am not so sure in his case. It means that this poor dying poet—he was a poet, didn't I say?"

"No, indeed you didn't," said Lucy.

"Oh, yes, he was a poet. Well, this poor dying poet had to make such use of his failing voice to express all the meaning of the poems he loved above all others, that he would not allow the most delicate touch of meaning or feeling to escape in his reading. Now you begin to understand, Lucelet? Miss Grey's singing is as fine as that."

"Oh, if Nola is compared to a poet I don't mind. But a dying poet is rather a melancholy idea, and not a bit like Nola. I always think of Nola as full of health and life, and everything bright and delightful."

"Still I quite understand what Mr. Money means, and it is a great compliment," Minola said. "There must have been something wonderful, supernatural, in hearing this dying poet recite such lines."

"People with great strong voices hardly ever think much of what can be done by mere expression," Money remarked.

"Then we ought to be glad if we have not good voices?" Minola asked.

"Well, yes; in many cases, at least. I think so. It makes you sing all the better."

"And perhaps they would sing best who had no voice at all."

"Perhaps so," said Money gravely; "I shouldn't wonder."

After this they all laughed, and the moment of sentiment was gone. But yet Victor Heron remained very silent and seemingly thoughtful. The new and strange sensation which had arisen in him from hearing Minola's voice and seeing Lucy's tear-sparkled eyes had not faded yet. It perplexed him, and yet had something delightful in it. The author of "Caleb Williams" declared that in it he would give to the world such a book that no man who had read it should ever be quite the same man again. Such a change it happens to more ordinary beings to work unconsciously in many men or women. A verse of a ballad, an air played on a harp, a chance word or two, the expression of a lip or an eye, an all unstudied attitude, shall change a whole life so that never again shall it be exactly what it was before.

"We must be getting home," said Money. "There are speeches to be made to-morrow, Heron, my good fellow—there are deputations to receive, and I own to being a man who likes to sleep."

"Just here and just now," said Victor, "the speech-making and the deputations seem rather vulgar business."

He thought so now very sincerely. A sense of the vulgarity and futility of commonplace ambitions and struggles is one of the immemorial effects of moonlight, and music, and midnight air, and soft skies. But in Heron's case there was something more than all this which he did not yet understand.

"The things have to be got through anyhow," Mr. Money insisted, "and these young ladies will be losing altogether their beauty-sleep."

"Oh, I think the idea of going to sleep on such a night is odious, when we might be out under the stars in this delightful place!" Lucy exclaimed. "And besides, papa, the truth is that Nola and I always sit up together for ever so long after everybody else has gone, no matter what the hour may be—and so we might as well be here as anywhere else. If our beauty depends on early hours it is forfeited long since, and there's no use thinking about it now."

"I know Miss Grey is far too sensible a girl to share any such sentiments—so come with me, Miss Grey, and we shall at least set a good example."

He took Minola's arm and drew it within his own with good-humoured mastery, and led her away. Lucy and Victor had perforce to follow. They ran after Money and his companion. Minola could hear their laughter and the sound of their quick feet as they approached. Then when they came near they slackened their speed, and lagged a little behind. She could hear the sound of their voices as they talked. They spoke in low tones, but the sweet pure midnight air allowed at least the faint murmur of the tones to reach her ear as she walked quickly on, leaning on Mr. Money's arm, and trying to talk to him about the prospects of the coming election.

"If he loves her, he must tell her so now—here," Minola thought. "This surely is the place and the hour for a declaration of love, and he does love her—she is so very sweet and good."

She tried to make herself believe that she was very happy, and that she rejoiced to know that Lucy was loved—by him, and even that she was rather amused in a high, unconcerned way by their love-making. When they had crossed the stile of the park and passed into the streets, Victor and Lucy came up with them again, and walked by their side.

"It is done," Minola thought. "She has heard him now, and she has all her wish." Aloud she said, "I suppose you are right, Mr. Money, about the ballot—I had not thought much of that, but I am sure you must be right."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### MR. SHEPPARD'S OFFER OF SURRENDER.

MINOLA heard no word from Lucy that night about Heron. Lucy seemed to avoid all speech on any subject that had to do with the midnight walk in the park.

The next day brought Mr. Blanchet, very proud of having been sent for, and for the present, at least, filled with the novelty of a political contest. As Money had predicted, any objection which Heron might have to Blanchet gave way and vanished for the time, when Blanchet became in a manner a guest of his. But the poems which Blanchet was to contribute to the contest did not prove a great success. They were a little difficult to understand. When they were supposed to rouse the souls of Keeton electors on the subject of England's honour and duties, they were involved in such fantasy of thought and expression, that they would have had to be published with a glossary if they were to illuminate by a spark of meaning the mind of the acutest voter in the borough. Blanchet made, however, rather a picturesque figure on the platforms of meetings, and was useful as an attendant on the two young women when Money and Heron had to be busy elsewhere; and Mr. Money liked, for electioneering effect, the appearance of a large suite. Minola never saw the poet, except before the general company. He had consented to come to Keeton solely because he thought it would give him more than one opportunity of speaking a word or two to her in private; and no such chance seemed ever likely to present itself there. Minola was utterly unconscious of his wish or of its purpose. She did not know that when he was invited to Keeton he went to his sister, and told her that the happy chance had come at last; and that she had kissed him with tears in her eyes, and prayed for his success. Minola was as friendly with him as possible—far more so than she seemed to be with Heron, for example; but he got no such chance of trying his fortune as his sister and he had believed to be coming.

Is there often a political election with such cross-purposes going on in the midst of it? It would almost seem as if all the persons more directly concerned were either the planners or the objects of some little side game of love. We know what thoughts and hopes were formed on Victor Heron's account by poor Lucy and her father; and Minola soon learned that the Conservative candidate had still a purpose at his heart which no lawful returning-officer could gratify. Add to this, to go no further for the present, the purpose which we know that Mr. Blanchet had in consenting to try the part of Poet Laureate to the Liberal candidate, and we shall see that the game was a little complex which all these were playing.

Minola had made a grave mistake in judging the character of her discarded lover. She thought him a hypocrite, and he was not; she thought his love for her was all a sham, and it was not. He was a slow, formal man; formal in everything—in his morals as well as in his manners. For him the world's standard was all. He could not lift his mind above the level of the opinion of respectable people. What they said became the law of life to him. What they called proper he believed to be proper; what they condemned became in his eyes only deserving of condemnation. But he was quite sincere in this. What he came by this process to regard as wrong he would not have done himself—except under such circumstances of temptation or provocation as may ordinarily be held to excuse our human nature.

His love for Minola was very strong. It was the one genuine passion of his life. He had made up his mind that he would succeed in life, that he would become a person of importance in London, and that he would marry Minola Grey. Nor did her refusal much discourage him. After the first pang was over, he said to himself that all would come right yet; that at least she did not love anyone else, and that the world would come to him who waited, as he had known it to come to himself in other ways when he waited before. He had resolved to represent Keeton in the House of Commons, and now that resolve seemed to have nearly worked out its purpose. But the night when, passing under Minola's windows, he saw Victor Heron produced a terrible reaction within him. He felt satisfied that Heron must be in love with her, and he thought with agony that such a lover was very likely indeed to fascinate such a girl. He began to pay repeated visits to London in a half secret way, and to watch the movements of Minola, and to try to find out all he could about Victor and his friends. The thought of having Heron for his rival in both ways, in love and in ambition, was almost more than he could bear. There seemed something ominous, fateful in it. He became filled with a kind of superstitious feeling that if he lost the election he must lose all. He hated Heron with a passion that sometimes surprised himself. There appeared to him to be something wicked in this young man coming from the other side of the earth to cross him in his two great desires. His slow, formal nature worked itself up into dense consistency of hate. The election contest became a relief to him. It was like meeting his rival in battle. The fierce joy was heightened when Minola came to Keeton. To win under such conditions would be like killing his rival under her very eyes.

It was when at the very height of his hope, and when the anticipation of revenge was turning our formal moralist into a sort of moral Berserker, that a piece of news reached his ears which well-nigh changed his purpose. He was told that Victor Heron was to marry Mr. Money's daughter, and that that was the reason why Money took such interest in the contest. He was assured of this on what seemed to him good authority. In fact, the report hardly needed any authority to confirm it in his mind. What could be more probable? What could more satisfactorily explain everything? What other purpose could a man like Money have in taking all that trouble about a stranger like Heron? Mr. Sheppard trembled to think of the mistake he had nearly made.

So, then, it was not certain that Minola was lost to him, after all? A moment before, he was only thinking of revenge for an irreparable injury. Now hope sprung up again. At the bottom of Sheppard's nature was a very large reserve of that self-confidence or self-conceit which had carried him so far on his way to success; and he was easily roused to hope again in his chances of conquering Minola's objection to him.

He became suddenly filled with an idea which, in all the thick and heat of his preparations for the contest, he determined to put to proof. By this time it should be said that he had little doubt of how the struggle would go if it were left to be a duel between him and Heron. What it cost him to take the step he is now taking will be better appreciated if this conviction of his is kept in mind.

Mr. Sheppard dressed one afternoon with even more than his usual care, but in style a little different from that which he commonly adopted. He had got a vague idea that his usual manner of dressing was rather too formal to please a girl like Minola, and that it was wanting in picturesqueness and in artistic effect. He had studied many poems and works of art lately, with much pain and patience, and tried to qualify himself for an understanding of those schools and theories of art which, as they were said to be new, and were generally out of Keeton's range, he assumed to be those of the London circles which Minola was reported to frequent. He got himself up in a velvet coat, with a tie of sage-green silk and a bronze watch-chain, and a brazen *porte-bonheur* clasping his wrist. He looked like a churchwarden masquerading as an actor. Thus attired, he set forth to pay a visit to Minola.

He had met her several times during the settlement of the business consequent on the death of Mrs. Saulsbury. He had met Mr. Money often, and acted sometimes as the representative in business matters of Mr. Saulsbury. He had always demeaned himself on such occasions with a somewhat distant courtesy and respect, as if he wished to stand on terms of formal acquaintanceship, and nothing more. He was very anxious to get once more on such terms with Minola as would allow him to see her and speak with her now and then, without her being always on her guard against love-making. It seemed clear to him that he had better retire for a while from his former position, and try to take the attitude of one who, having been refused, has finally accepted the refusal. His manner did in fact impose upon Minola. Never having believed in the reality of his love, she found no difficulty in believing that he had easily reconciled himself to disappointment, and that he had, perhaps, his eyes turned somewhere else already. Whenever they did meet they were friendly, and Minola saw no great necessity for avoiding him, except such as might seem to be imposed upon her by the fact that her friends were on one side of the political contest, while he was on the other. Mr. Sheppard even called to see her once or twice about some of the affairs of Mr. Saulsbury, and saw her alone, and said no word that did not relate to matters of business. It was a great relief to Minola to see him and not Mr. Saulsbury, and she was even frank enough to tell him so. He only said, with a grave smile, that he feared she "really never had done justice, never had done quite justice," to the motives and the character of Mr. Saulsbury. But he admitted that Mr. Saulsbury's austere manners were a little against him.

No surprise, therefore, was created in the mind of any of our friends when one morning Mr. Sheppard's card was brought to Minola, and she was told that he wished to speak a few words with her.

Mr. Money had never heard anything about Sheppard's former attentions to Minola. He was inclined to think Sheppard a very good fellow for taking any trouble about Minola's affairs at a time when he had so much of his own to occupy him.

So Minola received Mr. Sheppard in one of the sitting-rooms of the hotel, and was not displeased to see him. She even asked if he would not like to see Mr. Money. This was after he had talked to her about the particular object of his coming—something relating to what seemed in her mind the interminable arrangements about the house property which had fallen to her share.

"I should have no objection to see Mr. Money, Miss Grey—none whatever; I hope we may be good friends, although Providence has decreed that we should be on opposite sides of this political controversy. But I am not sure whether under the circumstances it would be agreeable to all parties if I were to see Mr. Heron, or whether, not being on such terms with him, I ought to call on his friend. These are points, Miss Grey, on which you, as a lady, might not like to decide."

"Oh, I couldn't think of deciding!" Minola said hastily, for she had made her suggestion in obedience to a sudden impulse, and was not sure that she had not done something wrong; "I don't know anything about it, and perhaps I ought not to have said anything at all."

"Your suggestion, Miss Grey, was only in accordance with all the impulses of your generous nature." Mr. Sheppard still loved as much as ever his long and formal sentences. Minola could not help wondering how the House of Commons would like such a style, if Mr. Sheppard ever got a chance of displaying it there.

"You do not, I hope," he continued, "disapprove of my ambition to distinguish myself in political life? You know that I have for years cherished such an ambition; that hope still remains to me. It is not, surely, an illegitimate or unreasonable hope?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Sheppard, far from it; I am sure that I, like all your friends, shall be very glad to hear that you have been successful in your ambition—I think it ought to be the ambition of every man who has any talents."

"Thank you, Miss Grey. You do not, I observe, wish me success in this particular contest. That, I suppose, would be too much for me to expect?"

Minola only shook her head.

"I am afraid I shall only grieve you in this then," he said, dropping his eyes, "for I am certain to win, Miss Grey."

Minola thought of her unholy compact, and wished he would talk of something else, or, better still, go away.

"I am sorry you can't both win," she said good-humouredly, "then we could all be pleased, and we might say all we liked without fear of seeming unfriendly to one or the other." She could not help feeling that this speech was a little like one of Mr. Sheppard's own.

"Is it true," Mr. Sheppard asked abruptly, "what people say in Keeton—this about Mr. Heron and Miss Money?"

"I don't know much about the gossip of Keeton, Mr. Sheppard, and it would not have much interest for me—I don't like Keeton."

"It is not, perhaps, mere gossip. They say that Mr. Heron is to be married to Mr. Money's daughter; that, they say, is the reason why we in Keeton are favoured with the personal interference of Mr. Money in our local affairs."

Minola rose, and seemed as if she were resolved that the conversation must end there.

"I can't tell you anything about that, Mr. Sheppard; even if I knew anything, which I don't, I could hardly be expected to talk about it. It does not concern you or me much, I suppose."

"It concerns me greatly," he said warmly. "Of course it concerns me that a stranger should come down here to Keeton interfering in our affairs, and making discord and confusion where we are all inclined to harmony. But I tell you this, Miss Grey, and you may tell your friends so, if you like—they haven't a chance here, except through you."

Minola was amazed, and could not help looking up with an expression of curiosity. Was this to be another offer to put the decision of the contest in her hands?

"Yes," he went on, as if he had understood her thought, "it shall be in your hands if you wish it. I am very ambitious of representing my native town in Parliament; but I have an ambition twenty times stronger than that, and an older ambition too. If you wish to see your friends succeed in this affair, declare your wish, and I will withdraw to please you. I can find a chance somewhere else; I am not likely to fail in anything I set my heart upon; and no other man but myself could carry this borough in the duke's interest at such a time as this. I can carry it, and if we two stand alone—Mr. Heron and I—I am safe to carry it; but if you only say the word, I will give up the place this moment. Think of it, Miss Grey—do give it a moment of thought. I don't want to bind you to anything; I don't put any condition; I only ask you to let me do this for *you*."

His eyes were full of eagerness, and his manner had almost lost its formalism. He did not seem to her the man she had ever known before. She felt something like respect for him.

"I could not ask you to do anything of the kind for me, Mr. Sheppard," she said gently. "Why should I? What right could I have to allow you to make any sacrifice for me? This would be a great sacrifice; and I suppose a thing a man ought not to do for any personal feeling."

"You are quite right; you had always a clearer understanding than women are supposed to have about these things—I remember your father saying so often. It would raise an outcry here against me. My own party would denounce me; I should never be looked at by any of the duke's people again. You can hardly think what a sacrifice it would be to a man like me. But that's why I offer it. I want to make some great sacrifice—I do!—to prove to you that I am sincere, and that there is nothing I would not do for you. Mind, I am not talking of making a bargain. I only say, if you wish me to do this, it shall be done. That's all."

"I don't wish you, Mr. Sheppard; it would be most unfair and wrong of me to do so. It would be a shameful thing of me, I think, and I wish you had not thought of it, although I can't help feeling that I owe you some thanks even for the offer."

"Think of it, Miss Grey—just think a little more of it. I mean it, I assure you; I mean it all. Let him have the seat if it pleases Mr. Money and his daughter, and if you want to please them. It will be all your doing, mind! I should be glad to make Mr. Money's acquaintance more than I have done; I have no ill-will to Mr. Heron; why should I have? I am not in love with Miss Money," he added, with rather a sickly smile, that it pained Minola to see.

"I don't need to think it over, Mr. Sheppard; I know already what I ought to say. I could not ask you to do such a thing for me, or allow you to do it if I could prevent you. I don't understand much about such things, but it seems to me that what you propose would be dishonourable to you. No, Mr. Sheppard; go on and fight out your fight—why should you not? We may be friends all of us just the same."

"I want to do this for you—to show you that I am sincere in all that I—all that I ever said to you."

Minola felt a colour coming on her cheeks.

"I can believe you to be sincere without such a proof as that," she said.

"But do you—do you? I could be content if I thought you did believe that. Tell me that you do believe that."

"Why should I not believe it? I have always heard you spoken of as a man of the highest character——"

"It isn't that," he said cutting off her words abruptly; "it is not that I am speaking about. You know it is not that! I want you to tell me whether you believe that I am sincere in loving you."

"I thought we were never to speak of this again," she said, and she was moving almost in alarm towards the door. He quietly stood in her way and prevented her.

"I never said so. I told you I would not give up my hope, and I don't mean to give it up. I told you in the park here, the first day that I spoke out—I told you that I would not give up, and I will not. I love you always; I did from the time when you were a child, and I was not so very much more. I am slow sometimes, but when I get a feeling like that it never leaves me. I know you used to laugh at me and to make fun of me, but I didn't care much about that, and I don't care. It wasn't a very generous thing to do, knowing what you did about me. No, no, Minola, you shan't go yet; indeed you shan't. You must hear me now, once for all."

"If it will be once for all, Mr. Sheppard; if you will promise me that——"

"No, no! I'll promise nothing. I'll never give up this hope, I tell you fairly; never, never, Minola. Yes, you used to laugh at me, and it wasn't generous; but who expects generosity from a woman?—and in any case it couldn't change the feelings of a man like me to you—no, not if you treated me like a dog. You don't know what it is to be insanely in love with some one who does not care about you. If you did, you could make some allowance for me."

His whole manner was so strange and so wild that it compelled the attention of Minola, and almost made her afraid. She had never seen in him anything like this before. Some of his words, too, fell touchingly and painfully on her ear. Did she, then, not know what it was to be foolishly in love without hope of return? Did she not? and ought not what she knew to make her more tender towards this man, who, in so strange a way, seemed to be only in like case with herself? She ceased to fear Mr. Sheppard, or to feel her old repugnance for him. Her manner became gentle and even sweet, as she spoke to him, and tried to reason with him.

"If I ever did laugh at you, Mr. Sheppard, it was only as girls who know no better will laugh at people whom, if they only did know better, they would respect. I was wrong and silly, and I ask your pardon most sincerely. I don't think, Mr. Sheppard, I am likely to offend many people by any excess of good spirits for the future."

"You never offended me," he said eagerly; "or, if you did, it was only for the moment, and I didn't care. You were welcome to say anything you liked, and to laugh at me as much as you liked; you are still. You may laugh at me, Minola, the moment my back is turned, if you like. That won't make me love you the less, or give up trying to make you change your mind."

"Why can't we be friends, Mr. Sheppard? I could like you much, I am sure now, if you would only let me."

"No, no! we never can be friends," he said, taking up his hat, as if he felt that it would be useless to say any more then. "We might be enemies, Minola—although I can't well think of myself as your enemy—but I'll never consent to be your friend."

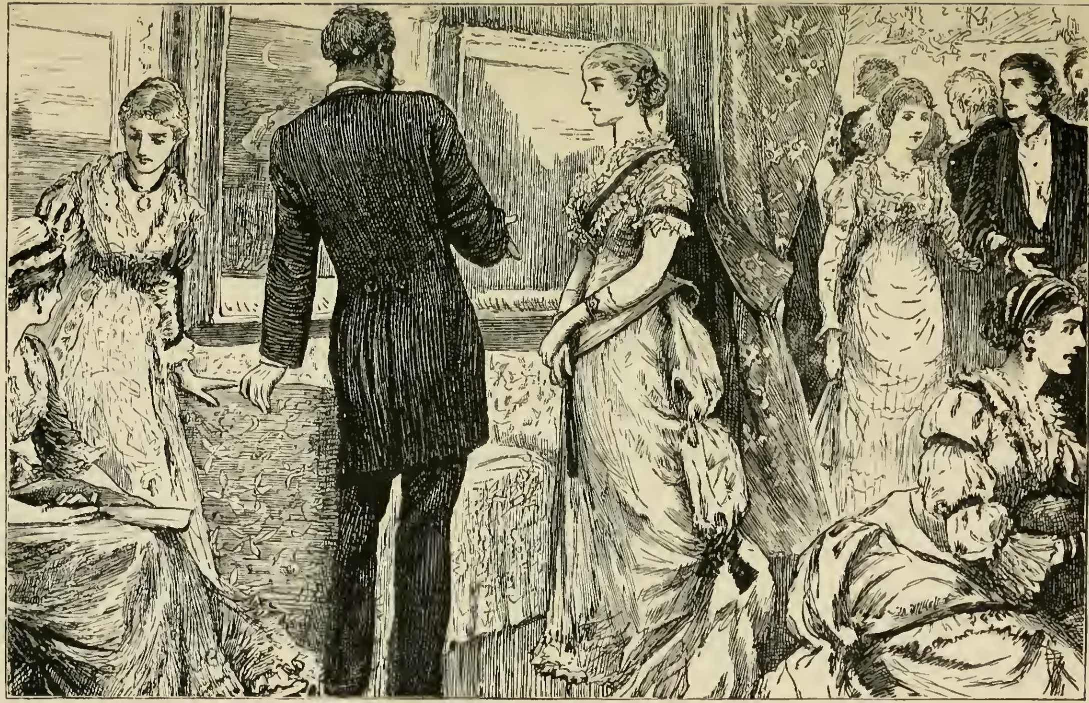
"We never can be anything else then," Minola said more firmly. "I don't mean to marry; the man does not live in the world," she declared with positive energy, "whom I would marry; and I couldn't love you, Mr. Sheppard; and for heaven's sake, I beseech of you, let us not have all this to go over again and again. I wonder men can degrade themselves in such a manner—it is pitiful; it is shameful!" she added. "I would not, if I were a man, so lower myself for all the women in the world."

"There is nothing I would not lower myself to for you—nothing I would not do for you. I don't call it lowering myself; I am in love with you, and I would do anything to carry my point; and I don't give up yet. Don't let it be war to the knife between us two, Minola."

"I want no war, but only peace," she said gently. "I want to be your friend, Mr. Sheppard; I will not be your enemy even if you do persecute me."

He made no further effort to detain her, but opened the door for her, and allowed her to go without another word.

Mr. Sheppard's passion, strong as it was, did not whollyf.doib him. He saw that he had gained an advantage worth trying rln He saw that Minola had been impressed for the first time with a certain respect for him. This was something to have gained, and he went away with a feeling of satisfaction. He had offered to give



*"That is what comes of being popular and a success."*

up one great and, as he believed, almost certain chance of gratifying his ambition for her sake. He was perfectly sincere in the offer, and he would have been wild with pride and delight if she had accepted it. Now that she had refused, he felt that the best thing he could do was to fight the battle out as she had said herself, and win it. "When I defeat her friend, she can't laugh at me then," he thought. Mr. Sheppard had not had much experience in the ways of women, nor had he studied women and courtship in romance or poetry. But he had enough at least of instinctive knowledge to understand that power and success count for more usually in the eyes of women than piteous appeal. He went home prepared again for the battle, and again longing for it.

It is quite true that Minola for her part felt a higher respect for him than she had ever known before. Her own experiences had taught and had softened her. He really was sincere; he was in love, and with her, she now felt. Perhaps a woman can never feel merely anger or scorn for one who she believes does really love her. The whole bearing of the man had seemed to be dignified by genuine emotion. His strange offer had something in it that she recognised as chivalrous in a sort of perverted way. When Minola used to read "Ivanhoe," and think over all its people as if they were living beings whom she either loved or hated, she always felt driven in despite of all propriety to feel a certain admiration for the Templar, Brian de Bois Guilbert. Especially was she struck with admiration for him when he offered to throw away career and reputation in Europe if Rebecca would love him, and go with him to seek out some new sphere of life. The memory of these readings and thinkings came oddly back upon her now.

"This poor Sheppard is a sort of Templar," she could not help thinking. "To offend the duke's people is just as great a sacrifice for him as for my old friend Bois Guilbert to throw away the chances of rising to be Grand Master of his Order. The public opinion of Keeton is as much to one hero as the voice of Europe to the other. Going to look for a new borough is as bad a thing perhaps in our days as trying for a new career among the Saracens or wherever it was. I begin to think poor Mr. Sheppard is as good a hero as anyone else. He is a fool to make such an offer, and I suppose it is rather dishonourable—at least, it looks a little like that to me—but I suppose all men will twist their code of honour a little to suit themselves, and at all events it is no worse than the conduct of the Templar, and I used to admire him."

Of course in all this Minola assumed herself to be talking ironically, and in fact to be relieving her mind of many sarcasms at the expense of man. But there was a little of earnest too in her enforced jesting.

"Our rival must have a good deal of time to spare," Mr. Money observed when Minola saw him shortly after; "or he must be very good-natured to take so much trouble about Mr. Saulsbury's affairs. I suspect the truth is that he feels pretty sure of the result."

"Then you think we have lost?" Minola asked, dismayed.

"All except honour, I fear," he answered coolly. "I don't see much chance, Miss Grey. The extreme 'Rads' won't have anything to do with us, I am pretty sure. Your Keeton friend stands to win unless something wonderful happens."

"But will those extreme people vote for him—for Mr. Sheppard?"

"There's no knowing; you can't count upon these fellows. But even if they don't, you see it will come to about the same thing—at least, unless they all hold back in a mass, which is not at all likely. I think it will be this way: a few of them will vote for Sheppard, just because they hate no one so much as a Liberal who is not strong enough for them; and those few will be enough to give your Keeton friend the seat."

Lucy and Minola both looked rather blank at this prospect. Minola began almost to wish she had taken Sheppard at his word. Suddenly Mr. Money was called away by some political fellow-worker, who had a face which was like a title-page to some wonderful volume of news.

In a few moments Mr. Money returned full of excitement, and holding a paper in his hand.

"I say, young ladies," he exclaimed, "here's a new incident for you; something sensational, I should say. Here's our friend St. Paul coming out himself at the last moment as a candidate for Keeton in the Red Republican interest, and denouncing the duke, his brother, as if the duke were Cain and he were the ghost of Abel."

"But can he do that, papa?" asked Lucy indignantly.

"Can he do what, Lucelet?"

"Become a candidate now, dear, at this time?"

"Why, of course he can—what should hinder him? The nomination isn't until the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, but I call it so unfair!"

"My dear little Lucelet, what do you think he cares what you call it or what anybody else calls it?"

"Then does this destroy our chances altogether?" Lucy plaintively asked. "I always thought he was a treacherous man."

"Stuff my good little girl; there are no treacheries in politics and elections. But I must think this over a little. I am not by any means sure that it may not prove an uncommonly good thing for us, by Jove. Where's Heron? I must get at him at once; and so, young ladies, good-bye for the moment."

Mr. Money hurried away. During the few moments he had stopped to talk to the girls several excited heads had been thrust into the room, as if entreating him to come away.

Minola, too, was not by any means sure that this new incident was not meant to turn to the account of Victor Heron. This, then, was clearly Mr. St. Paul's plot. She understood quite enough of the explanation Mr. Money had been giving to see that if any of the extreme Radical votes could be taken from Sheppard's side the chances of Heron would go up at once. She could not doubt that Mr. St. Paul knew this still better. She became full of excitement; and, such is the demoralising effect of all manner of competition on human creatures, that Minola now found herself wishing that the candidate she favoured might win by Mr. St. Paul's device or that of anyone else; but win somehow.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### "MISCHIEF, THOU ART AFOOT."

Never was the aspect of a community more suddenly changed than that of Keeton from the moment when St. Paul flung himself into the contest. Up to that hour a grave decorum had governed even its most strenuous efforts. There was plenty of speech-making, of crowds, confusion, and noise; but everything was in decent order. There were no personal attacks; and the Liberal candidate had not allowed a great scope even to the good spirits and the humorous powers of all his followers. A somewhat elaborate courtesy had been observed between the candidates and their leading supporters on both sides. Mr. Heron had always spoken with high respect of Mr. Sheppard, who of course had not failed on his part to do justice to the personal character of his opponent. In fact, as the orators on both sides were in the habit of observing about twenty times a day, it was a contest of political principles altogether, and by no means a contest of persons.

All this was now changed. Mr. St. Paul had leaped into the arena with a vivacity which proved only too contagious. His speeches were alternations of vehement personal abuse and broad, audacious humour. Throne, altar, and caste seemed alike to be the targets of his oratory. He was the reddest of all Red Republicans. He was the typical *prolétaire* of *prolétaires*. Mr. Money had denounced the Ministers and the Tories; Mr. St. Paul denounced the Ministers, the Opposition, the Tories, the Liberals, the aristocracy, and the middle-class with equal fervour. The employers of labour and the clergy of all denominations came in for rattling vituperation at his hands. He assailed the two candidates and their political professions with good-humoured contempt. He declared that if the Liberal candidate had a personal grievance which he wanted to put right in the contest, he, St. Paul, had a personal grievance of a nature far more nearly concerning the people of Keeton—a grievance against the brother who had disowned and cast him off; who had slandered him, ousted him from the affections of his father, driven him into exile; but who, thank heaven, could not intimidate him, or turn him into a crawling sycophant. He boasted that in spite of his brother, who had tried to ruin him, he had made a fortune by his own hands and his own brains in the great Free Republic, the land where there were no dukes, where all men were equal, where there was no hireling State clergy, and no trampling tyranny of employers—need he say it was the glorious republic beyond the Atlantic? He made dreadful work of the allusion in Mr. Sheppard's address to the services rendered to Keeton by the ducal family. He indignantly asked of his hearers what a duke had ever done for the town. When had a duke pressed the honest hand of a Keeton working-man? When had a duke or a duchess taken the slightest interest in the poor and virtuous working-women of Keeton? Nay, he asked, when had a Keeton tradesman—and the Keeton tradesmen had done more to make the place than the dukes—when had a Keeton tradesman or his wife been invited inside the doors of the ducal residence? The very men who were fighting the duke's battle to-day would find themselves very lucky indeed if they got even a civil bow from the duke or the duchess to-morrow.

There was quite enough of truth in these hits to make them tell. St. Paul managed to "fetch," as he would himself have expressed it, a good many among the discontented middle-class of the place. But with the *prolétaire* he was a tremendous success. There had been some quarrel lately between the employers and the workpeople in the town, in which the latter were finally defeated, and the defeat rankled in their hearts, and they were glad of any chance of giving vent to their sense of wrong. St. Paul was, of course, all the more successful when he denounced aristocracy and caste because of his being one of the aristocracy and the ruling caste himself. He proudly declared that he had renounced his courtesy title, and that he stood on his merits as a man—a working-man who had worked with his own hands in a free land, and made a fortune there by manly energies, and brains, and strength.

One little incident made him more than ever a hero. At the second meeting he held—it was in the large room of a great public-house—there was a good deal of noisy interruption, which seemed to come from one man in especial. He was recognised at once as a person employed in some way by Mr. Sheppard: a man of great muscle and a sort of local bully. Loud cries of "Turn him out!" were raised. The disturber bawled a defiant request to the general company to let him know who proposed to turn him out.

St. Paul paused in his flow of eloquence.

"The honourable elector wishes to know," he said, in his familiar tone of imperturbable good-humour, "who will turn him out? I can tell him at once. I'll turn him out if he interrupts again in any way. This meeting is called by me. This hall is hired by me. I beg of my friends here not to interfere in the slightest. If that honourable elector interrupts again I will throw him down those stairs."

Amid tremendous cheering the intrepid St. Paul resumed his eloquent argument. His boisterous enemy at once began his interruption all over again. St. Paul stopped.

"Let no one interfere," he quietly said, "while I put that person out of the room."

He promptly came down from the platform, amid vociferous cheering and wild excitement.

Then followed a tumultuous scene, in which cheering, screaming, stamping, struggling, swearing, and indescribable noise of all kinds deafened every ear. A way was made for St. Paul, who advanced towards his antagonist. The latter awaited him in attitude of utter defiance. St. Paul seized him round the waist and a furious struggle set in. It was not of long endurance, however. The local bully was well enough in Keeton "rows." He had strength enough and all the skill that Keeton quarrels could teach; but St. Paul had had the training of Eton, and Oxford, and London, and all the practice of the rugged West. He was the Gamin and the Rowdy in one. The outlawry of two hemispheres had taught him its arts of defence and offence. He lifted the unlucky and too confident disturber clean off his feet. He carried him out through frantically-cheering ranks, and he kept his word by literally throwing him down the stairs.

Then he came back, good-humoured and cool as ever, and he went on with his speech. He was the idol of the Keeton mob from that moment forth. He was escorted that night to his hotel by a tumultuous throng of admirers, who would probably have offered to pull down the ducal hall if the rebel of the ducal family had hinted that it would give him any pleasure to see it done.

All this changed completely the character of the contest. It became fierce and turbulent on both sides. Some of the followers of Mr. Sheppard tried retaliation, very much against the prudent advice of that candidate himself. The few days remaining before the election were so furious and riotous, that Mr. Money began to think it would be best to send his daughter and Minola home to London. Mr. Heron was so much engrossed in his cause and his speeches that he hardly heeded the tumults. He had been used to rougher scenes, and these made scarcely any impression on him. It sometimes seemed to Minola that Mr. Blanchet liked the tumult less than anyone; that even Lucy did not shrink from it with so much abhorrence. It was natural, she thought, that one who was at least of poetic nature, even if he were not a great poet, should shrink away from such degrading scenes. She felt her half-assumed dislike for men grow more and more into reality as she saw these specimens of the way in which they conduct their political contests.

In truth, there had been springing up in sleepy Keeton of late years a class of whom the park knew nothing, of whom the middle-class knew little more, but which was likely to make a considerable change in the way of conducting local politics. The park and the middle-class heeded nothing, while this rough new body was growing into ideas about its own strength, its own wrongs, and its own rights. In Keeton, as in other places, people would probably have thought it wise to shut away from themselves all knowledge of unpleasant facts as long as they could; and if it had been hinted that there was a somewhat self-conceited and fierce *prolétaire* class growing up in the town during all the years while the middle-class were fawning on the dukes and duchesses, and the dukes and duchesses were languidly patronising the middle-class, the prudent persons would have preferred to hear and say no more about such unlikely and disagreeable things. The election contest first made it evident that some of the seed grains scattered by modern socialism had been blown as far as Keeton, and had sunk into the soil there and begun to grow up into rugged stems and prickly leaves.

Minola absolutely refused to save herself by flight to London, or to believe that there could be any danger of serious disturbance.

If nothing else had kept her from leaving Keeton, her curiosity would have been enough. She was intensely anxious to see what would come of St. Paul's appearance on the scene. She was almost afraid to think of the part she had innocently consented to play. She remembered now St. Paul's illustration about the king who was summoned to cut the mysterious rope, and she thought that she was really in a position very much like his. She was perplexed, amused, curious, a little afraid, but still anxious above all things for Victor Heron's success, and determined to see the contest out, come what might.

It was the night before the polling-day. Minola and Lucy were alone in their room. Victor Heron and Money were away speechmaking somewhere. Since the appearance of St. Paul in the strife the girls had not gone to many meetings, or left the hotel after nightfall. Things were looking rather uncheerful now, and the two young women no longer regarded the whole affair as a great holiday or masquerade.

Lucy in especial was melancholy. The little weather-glass of her temperament rose and fell very readily to the changes of the atmosphere around her. The two friends were silent for a while. Lucy began at last to talk of what filled her mind.

"I wish this was all over, Nola dear; I have a horrid foreboding as if something were going to happen—something unpleasant, I mean, of course."

"This room is dull," Minola said. "Come out on the balcony, Lucy. The evening is beautiful. It is a sin to sit here and not see the sky."

The girls went into the balcony, and stood there and looked out upon the scene. The hotel stood not far from the Court House, which Minola used to know so well in former days. The roof of the Court and the capitals of some of its white pillars could be seen from the balcony. In another direction lay the bridge, a little to the right of the girls in the balcony. The place where the hotel and the Court House stood was one of the few broad openings among the little maze of narrow streets which made up the town of Keeton. Minola could see the bridge plainly, and across the bridge the dark trees of the park. A faint continuous murmur was in their ears all the time. It might perhaps be the rush of the river, a little louder of sound than was its wont; but Minola fancied it was the noise of shouting mobs somewhere—a noise to which Keeton streets, once so sleepy, were growing of late to be somewhat accustomed. This, however, was louder and longer than the sound of such popular manifestations as it usually reached the hotel. Minola, if she felt any alarm or misgiving, thought the best thing would be not to call her companion's attention to the sounds.

The night was beautiful, as Minola had said. It was yet summer, although the evenings were growing short; no breath of autumnal chilliness yet saddened the soft air.

"I wish they would come back,' Lucy murmured. "I don't at all like our being left alone in this way, Nola. I feel as if we ought to be afraid. Don't you?"

"No, dear; there is nothing to be afraid of."

"Do you think so really? Ah! but it is different with you."

Lucy sighed, and Minola knew well what she would have said if she had spoken out her thoughts. She would have said, "It is so different with you; you can afford to be composed and not alarmed, for you have not a father engaged in all this, nor a man whom you love." Minola read her thoughts and was silent, thinking all the more herself for the silence.

"Hush, there is somebody," Lucy suddenly said, looking back into the room. "There certainly is some one there."

So there was; but it was not either of the two Lucy wished to see. It proved to be Mr. Blanchet, who had come into the room unseen while the girls were in the balcony. Minola felt glad to see him on the whole. It was a relief from the melancholy monotony of the evening, and of poor little Lucy's bodings and fears.

Herbert Blanchet came out into the balcony in his familiar way, the way of a picturesque poet conscious of his poetry and his picturesqueness. It was a curious study, if any unconcerned observer there and then could have made the study, to notice the difference between the manner of Blanchet towards the two girls. To Lucy he was easy and even patronising, as if he would convey the idea that it was a kindness on his part to make himself agreeable to her. But to Minola he went on as if she were his acknowledged patroness and the ruler of his destiny. In good truth, however, there was not then much of a place for him in the mind of either girl.

"Where have you come from? Where is papa?" Lucy asked with eagerness.

"I have not been in the town," he said; "I was away by the river. I heard noises—shouting and all that—and I did not care to get among the fellows in their electioneering work. I have had rather more than I care for of it. My fellow-man seems a particularly offensive creature to me when he is in his political and robustious moods. I don't, as a rule, care much about Nature, but I prefer her company by far to that of such bellowing humanity as we see down yonder."

"I hope nothing has happened to papa, or to Mr. Heron?"

"Oh, nothing has happened, you may be sure!" the poet replied coolly. "They both rather revel in that sort of thing—it seems to be their native element. It won't harm them. In my case it is different; I don't belong to the political arena; I have nothing to do with the political elevation of my fellow-man. If he is to be elevated, I am content; if not, I am content also."

"I don't know how any man can be content to stand here in a balcony talking to two girls," said Minola, "while there is so much excitement down there. I could not, if I were a man."

"I will go down there if you wish," he replied with deprecating grace, "although I don't know that I could be of much use; but I don't suppose there is any real danger."

"I did not speak of danger," Minola said, rather contemptuously. "I only meant that there seemed to be some manly excitement there. There is no danger. It is not a battle, Mr. Blanchet."

"There was some talk of a row," he answered; "your friend St. Paul seems to have set the people wild somehow. But I should not think it would come to anything. Anyhow, Miss Grey, if you think I ought to be there, or that I could do any good, you have only to send me there."

"No, no, Mr. Blanchet"—Minola was recovering her good humour—"I don't want you to go. But Miss Money was a little uneasy about her father, and perhaps we were both disappointed that you did not come bringing us some news from the seat of war. You see, they won't allow us to go to the front any more."

Meanwhile the noise grew louder and louder; it came nearer and nearer too. There was a fury in the sound as clearly to be distinguished from the shouting to which they were well accustomed as the obstreperous clamour of boys at play is from the cry of pain or passion.

"Something bad is going on, I know," Lucy said, turning pale and looking at Minola.

Minola and Blanchet both leaned from the balcony, and could see a straggling group of women, and boys, and a few men making, as in a sort of stampede, for the neighbourhood of the hotel. They all kept looking eagerly behind them, as if something were coming that way which they feared, and yet were curious, to see. These fugitives, if they were to be called so, seemed to increase in numbers even as the watchers in the balcony looked out.

Mr. Blanchet went languidly downstairs to ask what the commotion was about, but could hear nothing more precise in the hotel than the rumour that a riot of some kind had broken out in the town, and that there were not police enough to put it down. He came back to the balcony again. For his own part, he felt no manner of curiosity. He had always supposed that there were riots at elections, and he assumed that some persons of the lower classes generally got their heads broken. There was nothing in that to interest him. It might happen even that the candidates or their friends sometimes came in for rough treatment; Mr. Blanchet would not have been very much disturbed by that in the present case. If Mr. Heron had got hurt he would have thought that on the whole it served him right.

Minola watched eagerly from the balcony. Some affrighted people were now running past under the windows of the hotel, for the most part women dragging their children after them. Minola called out to some, and asked what was happening; but they only answered in some inarticulate attempt at explanation, and kept on their way. Some men passed almost in as much haste, and Blanchet called to them grandly to ask what was "up." One shouted out that there was a terrible row going on in the town, got up by the "St. Paul's men," and that the military were sent for. Two of Money's servants, one his own man, were seen going out of the hotel in the direction of the increasing clamour. Lucy cried to them, and asked where they were going, and what had happened; but they only returned a respectful reassurance, something to the effect that it was nothing of any consequence, and then ran on towards the scene of the supposed disturbance, looking as if they thought it of much greater consequence than they said. The waiters and other servants of the hotel were presently seen to make preparations for closing the doors and windows.

"Things are beginning to look serious," said Blanchet, beginning to look very serious himself.

"They must not close these windows," Minola said. "I mean to stay here and see what happens. If they do close the windows, I will stay here in the balcony all the same."

"And so will I, Nola," Lucy exclaimed, looking pale, but showing no want of pluck. "Something may have happened to papa."

"I don't know that it would not be better for you ladies to go in," Blanchet gravely urged. "I think, Miss Grey, you can hardly do much good here, and you would be quite safe indoors. Suppose you go in, and let them close these windows?"

"You don't seem to understand women's curiosity, Mr. Blanchet, if you fancy that Lucy and I could be content to be shut up while all you men were in the midst of some exciting adventure, and perhaps in most poetic danger." Minola spoke with a contempt she cared to make no effort to conceal. She thought Mr. Blanchet was selfish, and had no interest in the safety of other people. She had not yet formed the suspicion which later was forced into her mind.

Some of the servants of the hotel came to say that they believed there was a rather serious riot going on in the town, and that it would be prudent to close the windows and have the shutters put up, as it was quite possible that stones might be thrown, and might do mischief. Both the girls steadily refused to leave the balcony. Mr. Blanchet added his remonstrances, but without any effect. Minola suggested that the windows might be closed behind them as they stood on the balcony, and that Mr. Blanchet might, if he pleased, withdraw into the hotel; but she declared that Lucy and she would remain in the balcony.

"I don't believe there is a bit of real danger to us or to anyone," she declared.

"But, my dear young lady," Mr. Blanchet urged, "what possible good can you do in any case by remaining in this balcony? I don't see how you could help Mr. Money and Mr. Heron, supposing them to be in any danger, by staying out there when these people evidently want us to come in."

"For a poet, Mr. Blanchet," Minola said coldly, "you do not seem to have much of the dramatic instinct that helps people to understand the feelings of other people. Do you think Lucy Money could be content to hide herself in a cellar, and wait until some one kindly remembered to come and tell her how things were going with her father and—her friends?"

Minola spoke in immense scorn.

The argument was cut short. The flying crowd had been increasing every moment, and now the space before the windows of the hotel was thickly studded with people, who, having run thus far, appeared inclined to make a stand there, and see what was next to happen. The shadows were falling deeply, and it was beginning to be difficult to discern features clearly among the crowd under the windows. The clamour, the screaming, the noise of every kind had been increasing with each moment, until those in the balcony might almost have fancied that a battle of the old-fashioned kind, before the use of gunpowder, was being fought at a little distance.

In another moment a small group of persons came hurrying up to the door of the hotel in a direction opposite to that from which the clamour of strife was heard. Minola could see the uniforms of policemen among this hurrying and seemingly breathless group, and she thought she recognised one face in their midst.

The group consisted of a few policemen, wild with the haste and the excitement of their movements, and some civilians mixed up with them; and Minola soon saw that her first conjecture was right, and that they were forming a body-guard to protect Mr. Augustus Sheppard. She could now see Sheppard's face distinctly. It was pale, and full of surprise and wrath; but there did not seem much of fear about it. On the contrary, Mr. Sheppard seemed to be a sort of prisoner among his protectors and guardians. Apparently they were forcing him away from a scene where they believed there was danger for him, and he was endeavouring to argue against them, and almost to resist their friendly pressure. All this Minola, having tolerably quick powers of observation, took in, or believed she took in, at a glance.

The policemen and some of the civilians with them were knocking at the door of the hotel, and apparently expostulating with some of the people within. At first Minola could not understand the meaning of this. Mr. Blanchet was quicker. He guessed what was going on, and by leaning as far as his long form allowed him over the balcony he was able to hear some of the words of parley.

"I say," he said, drawing back his head, "this is rather too good. This fellow—what's-his-name? Sheppard—is the unpopular candidate now, and the mob is after him, and these policemen are asking the people to take him in here, and bring all the row on us. I do hope they won't do that. What do we care about the fellow? Why should we run any risks if the police themselves can't protect him?"

Mr. Blanchet was very pale.

"For shame, Mr. Blanchet!" Minola said indignantly. "Would you leave him to be killed?"

"Oh, they won't kill him! you may be sure——"

"No, not if we can save him," Minola said. "These people shall take him in! Lucy, these rooms belong to your father now—run to them and insist on their letting him in. I'll go down myself and open the doors, and bring him in."

"They shall let him in," Lucy exclaimed, and ran downstairs. Minola was about to follow her.

"This is very generous," said Blanchet, with a sickly effort a composure, "but it is very unwise, Miss Grey. I don't know that in the absence of Mr. Money I ought to allow you to expose yourselves to such risks."

"Try if you can hinder us, Mr. Blanchet! For shame! Yes, I *am* ashamed of you. Oh, no, don't talk to me! I am sorry to find that you are a coward."

With this hard word she left him and ran downstairs. Just at this moment he heard the doors opened, in compliance with the insistance of Lucy. He heard her say with a certain firm dignity, which he had hardly expected to find in the little maid, that if any harm were done to the hotel because of Mr. Sheppard being taken in, her father would make it good to the owner. Then, in a moment, the two girls returned, doing the honours as hostesses to Mr. Sheppard.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### ALL THE RIVALS AT ONCE.

Mr. Sheppard made what he must have felt to be a sort of triumphal entrance. Perhaps he might have said with perfect truth, in the language appropriate to election contests, that that was the proudest moment of his life. He was almost dragged into the room by the two breathless girls, who, in the generous delight of having saved him from danger, seemed as if they could not make too much of him. He felt Minola's hand on his, as she forced him into the room. She would not let him go until she had fairly brought him into the room and closed the door behind him. For Mr. Sheppard had really resisted with some earnestness the attempt to make him prisoner for his own safety. The genial constraint of Minola's hand was a delight. There was, less perceptibly to himself, another sensation of delight in his heart also. He had for the first time in his life been in serious danger, and he knew that he had not been afraid. It is no wonder if he felt a little like a hero now.

He came in a good deal flushed, and even, if we may say so, rumpled; but he made a gallant effort to keep up his composure. The first sight he met in the room was the pale, pitiful, angry, and scowling face of the insulted Blanchet. "Are they going to embrace the fellow?" the embittered poet asked of his indignant soul, as he saw the unpopular candidate thus led forward by the eager girls.

Blanchet fell back into a corner, not deigning to say a word of welcome to the rescued Sheppard. Mr. Sheppard, however, hardly noticed him.

"I am sorry to disturb you, ladies," he said; "and I am obliged beyond measure for your kindness. I am not afraid myself of any danger in Keeton, but the police thought some disturbance might happen, and they insisted on my going out of the streets; but I shall be able to relieve you of this intrusion in a few minutes, I feel quite certain."

"You shan't stir from this place, Mr. Sheppard, until everything is perfectly safe and quiet," Minola said. "If necessary, Lucy—Miss Money—and I will hold you prisoner until all danger is over. We are not afraid either."

At this moment there was such a renewal of the clamour that Minola could not restrain her curiosity, but, having begged Mr. Sheppard to remain where he was, and not show himself, she ran into the balcony again.

The sight she saw was so turbulent, and to her so unusual, that for a second or two she could make nothing of it. She saw only a confusion of heads and faces, and whirling arms and lights, and men falling, and furious blows interchanged, and the confusion was made almost bewildering by the shouting, the screaming, and the curses and yells of triumph which seemed to her excited ears to fill all the air. At last she got to understand, as if by a kind of inspiration, that a fierce mob were trying to break into the hotel, and that the police were doing their best to defend it. The poor police were getting the worst of it. At the same time she was aware of a certain commotion in the room behind her, which she felt somehow was occasioned by the efforts of Mr. Sheppard to get out at any risk to himself, and the attempts of Lucy and some of the servants to dissuade him. To this, however, Minola now could pay but slight attention. She felt herself growing sick and faint with horror as she saw one policeman struck down, and saw the blood streaming from his face. She could not keep from a wild cry. Suddenly her attention was drawn away even from this; for in a moment, she could not tell how, a diversion seemed to be effected in the struggle, and Minola saw that Heron and Mr. Money were in the thick of it.

Her first impulse was to spring back into the room and tell Lucy of her father's danger. Luckily, however, she had sense enough to restrain this mad impulse, and not to set Lucy wild with alarm to no possible purpose. She saw that Heron, at the head of a small, resolute body of followers, had fought his way in a moment into the very heart of the crowd, and was by the side of the policemen. He dragged to his feet the fallen policeman; he seized with vehement strength one after another of those who were pressing most fiercely on the poor fellow; she could see two or three of these in succession flung backwards in the crowd; she could see that Heron had some shining thing in his hand which she assumed to be a revolver; and she put her hands to her ears with a woman's instinctive horror of the sound which she expected to follow; and, when no sound came, she wondered why Heron did not use his weapon and defend the police. She could see Mr. Money engaged now in furious remonstrance and now in furious blows with some of the mob, whom he appeared to drag, and push, and drive about, as if there were no such thing in the world as the possibility of harm to himself, or of his getting the worst of it. For a while the resolute energy of the attempt at rescue made by Heron and Money appeared to carry all before it; but after a moment or two the mob saw how small was the number of those who were trying to effect the diversion. As Minola came to know afterwards, Heron and Money had only heard in another part of the town that a riot was going on near the hotel, and hurried on with half a dozen friends, arriving just at a very critical moment. They came by the same way as the police and Sheppard had come, and, falling on the mob unexpectedly, made for a moment a very successful diversion. But they were soon surrounded by the rallying crowd, and Minola saw her two friends receive many savage blows, and she wondered in all her wild alarm how they seemed to make so little of them, but went on struggling, striking, knocking down, just as before. Above all she wondered why Victor Heron did not use his revolver to defend his friends and himself, not knowing, as Victor did, that the weapon was good for nothing. At least, it was good for nothing just then but inarticulate dumb show. He had not loaded it, never thinking that there was the least chance of his having to use it: and, indeed, it was only by the merest chance that he happened to have it in his pocket. Such as it was, however, it had done him some service thus far; for more than one sturdy rioter had fallen back in sudden dismay, and given Victor a chance to knock his heels from under him when he found the muzzle of the revolver close to his forehead. This could not last long. The mob began to understand both the numbers and the weapons of their enemies. The police fought with redoubled pluck and energy for a while, but the combatants were all too crowded together to allow coolness and discipline to tell, as they might have done otherwise; and the numbers were overwhelming against our friends. Just as Minola saw Victor Heron struck with a stone on the head, and saw the red blood come streaming, she heard some one beside her in the balcony.

"Go back, Lucy," she cried; "go back!—this is no place for you."

"Is it a place for you, Miss Grey?" a melancholy voice asked, "It is not Lucy; it is I. You said I was a coward, Miss Grey; I'll show you that you have wronged me."

The poet, for all his excitement, was as grandly theatric as was his wont. He looked calmly over the exciting scene, and tried to keep his lips from quivering at its decidedly unpleasant aspect. That fierce, savage, unromantic, and even vulgar struggle was in truth a hideous whirlpool for a picturesque poet to plunge into. Yet was Mr. Blanchet's mind made up.

"Oh, Mr. Blanchet, they will be killed!"

"Who?—who?" the poet cried, peering wildly down into the horrible mob-caldron below.

"Oh, don't you see?—Mr. Heron, Mr. Heron—and Lucy's father! Oh, merciful heaven, he is down—they will kill him!"

"I'll save him," the poet wildly exclaimed; "I'll save him, Miss Grey, or perish with him!" He was armed with a poker, which he flourished madly round his head.

Even at that moment Minola was startled to see Blanchet preparing to scramble over the balcony, and fling himself that way into the thick of the fight.

"Oh, don't, don't!" she cried to him; "you will be killed."

He smiled back a wild smile.

"At least you shall say I am no coward," he exclaimed; and in another moment he had scrambled over the balcony and dropped himself, floundering, poker in hand, on the moving mass of heads below.

At any other moment Minola might have thought of the prayer in "Firmilian" for a poet to be sent down from above, and the unexpected and literal manner in which the prayer is answered. At any other moment, perhaps, she might have found it hard to restrain her laughter at the manner in which Mr. Blanchet came crashing down on the heads of some of the combatants, and the consternation which his descent created among them. At his first coming down he carried a dozen or so of combatants tumbling on the ground along with him, and Minola in her Rebecca-post of observation could see nothing but a confused mass of struggling legs and arms. But Mr. Blanchet somehow scrambled to his feet again, and he laid about him with his poker in such insane fashion, and with such advantage of long arms, that his single and wholly untutored prowess did really for the moment effect an unexpected diversion in favour of those he came to rescue. In a moment Minola saw Victor Heron on his feet again; and she saw him amid all the thick of the affray give Blanchet an encouraging and grateful clap on the back; and then she thought she saw Blanchet down again; and then confusion inextricable seemed to swallow up all.

All this, it will be understood, occupied but a few minutes. Suddenly the trampling of horses was heard, and a cry was raised that the cavalry were coming.

"Oh, thank God!" Minola said to herself and to the night air; "if it be not too late."

It was not the cavalry, however, but an interposition which at the moment proved as effective. Minola saw some men on horses gallop into the thick of the crowd, forcing their way as if human beings were not liable to any inconvenient consequences from having the hoofs of horses plunging among them. Wild and maddened as it was, the mob had to pay some little attention to these new-comers. One of them, who led the way, kept shouting in strident and occasionally shrilly tones a command to all who heard him to disperse and "stop the row." His voice and his presence were recognised in another moment, and the nearest rioters set up a tremendous cheer for him, which others caught up and renewed again and again, until Minola might have thought that the whole business in which they were engaged was to hurrah for the new-comer. Men actually in hand-to-hand fight with some policeman or other representative of the cause of order gave up for the moment defence or offence, and let the antagonist hammer away as he thought fit, while they cheered for their favourite. Minola had recognised him already. There was no mistaking the bald head, the bold blue eyes, the stooping shoulders, the general air of reckless bravado and good-humour. She could see his face and head plainly, for he carried his hat in his hand and waved it gallantly at every cheer of the crowd. He forced a way right up to the door of the hotel where the thick of the struggle was, and in passing under the balcony he looked up and saw Minola, and made her a courteous bow. There was some further scuffling, clamour, and altercation; but Minola could see that the influence of the popular candidate was all-prevailing, and that the battle was over. In a few seconds the crowd began to melt away. The air was rent with shouts of civil strife no longer, but with repeated cheers for the hero of the night. The police made some futile efforts to retain a few prisoners; but not much seemed to come of that. Minola was rejoiced to hear the voice of Mr. Money say, in its usual tones of blunt self-possession—

"Never mind, officers; you know the names of some of the fellows; you can see to them to-morrow; better look after yourselves just now. Where's the poor fellow who was hurt?"

In another moment or two Minola found herself out of the balcony, and trying to make a way into the room which she had quitted, and which seemed now a general resort. First she saw

Lucy throwing her arms round her father's neck. Then some shifting figure intervened, and she saw no more of Lucy, but was aware of Victor Heron and Mr. Sheppard exchanging friendly words. The room was full of people. She could hear various voices declaring that their owners were not in the least hurt; but she could see that Victor Heron had the mark of a large cut on the forehead, and that some one was tying Money's arm in a sling.

"Oh, I'm all right!" she heard Victor say; "nothing much happened to me; Money came off much worse. But that poor policeman—I am greatly afraid he was badly hurt."

"Never saw such scoundrels," Money observed; "by Jove, Heron, I thought at one time that your grievance was about to be settled for ever. It was all that confounded St. Paul's doings."

At this moment Minola saw the intrepid St. Paul himself enter the room. She, standing with her back to the window, saw him before anyone else did.

Mr. St. Paul pushed his way with his easy and indolent hardihood.

"I have come to offer an apology to the ladies," he said, while everyone turned round amazed at the sound of his voice, and he stood meeting with cheery composure the gaze of all the eyes, and all their various expressions. "I wish to offer an apology to the ladies, who, I am sorry to hear, were alarmed by the violence of some of my supporters—of course by no encouragement of mine, as every gentleman here will understand. But I am very sorry to hear that Miss Money and Miss Grey were alarmed by the little row, and I've come to offer them the assurance of my regret."

Victor Heron broke from those around him, and went up to St. Paul.

"Mr. St Paul, I hold you responsible for the whole of what has happened to-night," he said. "You set your blackguards on to disturb this town, and if any harm comes of it—if that poor policeman who has been hurt should come to any grief—you shall be accountable for it. I promise you that you shall."

"We are all rather confused to-night," St. Paul coolly replied, "and we are in a humour for making rather sweeping assertions. I am sorry you got hurt, Heron, on my honour; but there's no use in making a fuss about these things. I tell you what, my good fellow, you owe it to me altogether that you have not had your brains knocked out."

"Your gang of hired bravoes were capable of anything in the way of crime," Heron said; "but if they hadn't been twenty to one we shouldn't have wanted the intervention of their employer. Thank God, I put my mark on some of them!"

"Dare say you did—that's the way with all you peaceful fellows. I'm glad I came in time, however; and it's no use our losing our tempers about the whole affair. It wasn't much of a row, after all."

"Let me tell you, Mr. St. Paul," Money said, coming to the rescue, "that if you think you can carry things off in this way you are confoundedly mistaken. You know as well as I do that you will never be allowed to hold a seat got by such flagrant and such—such infernal intimidation."

"You may rely upon it, Mr. St. Paul," Mr. Sheppard said, likewise interfering in the dispute, "that neither Mr. Heron nor I will allow the proceedings of this night to go without a full judicial inquiry. Violence, sir, shall never be allowed to triumph in the parliamentary elections of this ancient and honourable borough."

"Bravo, Sheppard; that's very well said, indeed," the incorrigible St. Paul observed. "You have evidently been preparing for the place of its representative. But wouldn't it be as well, gentlemen, to wait until the close of the poll before we go into all this? I have, of course, all the confidence which a good cause and the support of the people must give a man; but in such a borough there are unfortunately other influences at work, as our friend Sheppard knows, and it is just possible that I may not be elected. For the present I only came to offer to the ladies the expression of my sincere regret that they should have been annoyed or alarmed in any way. I don't see Miss Money present; but I am happy enough to see Miss Grey, and I hope she will allow me to offer my apologies for what was, however, no fault of mine."

Minola had kept near her window all this time, and was in hope of escaping without notice. But Mr. St. Paul coolly made his way to her, pushing all intervening persons aside, as if they hardly counted for anything in his progress.

"I hope you don't think all this absurd affair was my personal doing," he said, when he was close to her.

"I hope it was not your doing," Minola replied emphatically; "I should think it disgraceful for anyone to have caused so much disturbance and done so much harm."

"Hadn't a thing to do with it, I give you my word. But don't you mind these fools—lucky for some of them that I came in time."

"It was disgraceful," said Minola; "a poor man was very much hurt, I am told."

"It was not a very big row, after all," he observed calmly; "I have seen twenty bigger, about which there wasn't half the talk. Anyhow, you'll find I have kept my word, Miss Grey! your man stands to win."

He made her a polite bow, took in the company generally in a friendly salute, and left the room with the same entirely self-satisfied good-humour which he had brought in with him.

Minola felt that in a manner the eyes of the world were on her. She went up to Mr. Money, passing Victor Heron on her way.

"Where is Lucy, Mr. Money?" she asked.

"Oh, we sent her out of the room! I really thought I saw you going with her. She got frightened when she saw that Heron—and myself, I suppose, were a little hurt. She is very nervous, and she seemed like fainting."

"I'll go to her," Minola said.

She was hastily leaving the room, when Victor Heron stopped her. He seemed greatly annoyed at something.

"What was that fellow saying to you, Miss Grey? I advised you before not to let that man talk to you so much. You are too young; you don't understand; but I do wish you would not encourage him. He seems to go on as if he were a personal friend of yours. Don't let him, Miss Grey—do have sense and take my advice."

Minola thanked him with a grave and perplexing politeness, and made haste to follow Lucy. While she was speaking to, or rather listening to, Heron, the eyes of Mr. Sheppard had been on them, even as the eyes of Heron had been on her while she spoke to Mr. St. Paul. Sheppard saw that her manner to Heron was cool and indifferent, and he was glad once more.

Victor Heron turned away disappointed. As Minola was leaving the room, she heard him ask—

"Where's Blanchet? Has anyone seen Blanchet? I saw him last in the thick of the fight—he came to my help in good time, and I hope he isn't hurt. Look for Blanchet, somebody."

A pang went through Minola's heart. She thought that if any harm had befallen the poet it might have been her bitter words which drove him in the way of it. "And I was quite unjust to him, and he is no coward," she said to herself remorsefully.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### VICTOR—PROPOSITI?

THE election was over. All the principal persons with whom we are concerned had come back to town. Keeton had nearly relapsed, for the time at least, into its ordinary condition. The riot, noisy and alarming as it was, had cost no life, not even that of the poor policeman who seemed most in danger. No doubt the seeds of a popular discontent were sown pretty broadly in the place, which will bear thorny growth some future day ; but Keeton just now seems only the sleepier for the reaction after its unwonted excitement. The persons of this story who were concerned in the election might be said to be in somewhat similar condition. They seemed much the same as before ; but the days in Keeton had sown some seeds for them, too, which will probably grow into influence on all their lives.

Lady Limpenny paid a visit to Mrs. Money. She had not seen her friends in Victoria Street since the election, and she was in great curiosity to hear something about it, and about some rumours indirectly connected with it, which had reached her ears. She went early, in order that she might find Mrs. Money alone.

Mrs. Money might be described as alone, so far as visitors were concerned. Only her younger daughter was with her. Lucy was looking very pretty, but pale ; and she had a certain restlessness of manner and quick brilliancy of eyes which Lady Limpenny observed, although usually a woman rather imaginative than actually observant. Lady Limpenny smiled and nodded to herself, as it might seem ; after the fashion of one who congratulates herself on having judged correctly, and who says to her own soul, "Exactly ; it is just as I thought it would be." But the smile and nod might be taken as partly intended for the general company in this case. Lady Limpenny appeared as if she were willing that Mrs. Money and her daughter should be taken, in an unacknowledged and modest way, into the confidence of her self-congratulations.

Mrs. Money went eagerly forward to welcome her old friend, and was cordially glad to see her, as, indeed, she was usually glad to see most persons. Lucy, as we know, did not greatly care for Lady Limpenny. She had now to submit to a peculiarly tender embrace, which she did with a particularly bad grace, looking all the time away from Lady Limpenny, even while she submitted to be kissed by her. Then she withdrew to a little sofa of her own, and was heard to express a wish that Nola Grey would come soon. On hearing this utterance Lady Limpenny looked round at her, and smiled and nodded again more benignly than ever.

"And so our dear friend Heron is in Parliament," Lady Limpenny said, in her soft, thunderous voice. "He is actually an M.P.! I am so glad; and you have all had such delightful adventures! Your names in the papers! I read it all with such envy. Yes; I always longed to be in an adventure and to have my name in the papers. I tried to get Sir James to listen to it, but he does not care for these things. You were all near being killed! And our friend, the handsome poet—now, do tell me again what his name is—he was lost, and actually supposed to be killed, or taken prisoner, or assaulted, or something of the kind. How delightful! I should so like to have been with you."

"Oh! Mr. Blanchet was not much hurt," Lucy said in a rather scornful tone. "He only got into the fight somehow; I don't know, I'm sure, what brought him there; and then he went away to London. I think something must have offended him."

Lucy had seen, and had not forgotten or forgiven, the poet's conduct when Mr. Sheppard was brought to the hotel during the riot, and she had not seen his subsequent dash into the strife, and paid but little attention to what was told her about it. But in any case poor Blanchet had long ceased to be a hero of hers. There was a time when he was her idol, and when she tried to believe in all manner of quaint artistic theories because they were his; and when, if he had expressed an æsthetic opinion that a lady ought to wear a coalscuttle on her head, Lucy would have fought hard to get her mother's permission to mount the article. It is strange, as the once popular song used to say, how a woman can think the man a bore, she thought a god before. At least, it is strange, perhaps, that she should make the change so soon; or, if it be contended that even that is not strange, it will surely be admitted that it is strange she could not contrive or attempt to make the change a little less glaringly apparent. One might have thought that this good little Lucy had already forgotten that she ever looked to Mr. Blanchet with wonder and admiration.

"Mr. Heron says that Mr. Blanchet was in great danger, Lucy, my dear," her mother interposed in remonstrance; "and Minola Grey speaks very highly of his conduct all the time."

"But why did he disappear in that abrupt sort of way? why didn't he tell anyone where he was going?" the pertinacious Lucy kept on. "We were all alarmed about him, and all for nothing; and we had quite enough to think about without that."

"But, my dearest darling Lucy, don't you look on a poet as different from ordinary people? I am sure *I* do. I should not like to think of our dear friend—now, *do* tell me again what *is* his name—I shouldn't like to think of his acting just as everyone else would do. Oh, no; I like a poet to be a poet. I am so passionately fond of poetry; and I have had to give it all up of late. I dare not read a poem now."

"For your soul's sake, Lady Limpenny?" the irreverent Lucy asked saucily.

"Darling, yes. For my soul's sake, as you say. I was forgetting all my higher duties in life, and all that I owe, dearest, to the future life, in my love for the poetry of that delightful writer—oh, now what *was* his name?—who wrote that lovely poem in the winter that everybody was talking about. My dear, the doctrines taught in that poem were something awful—I do assure you, awful. No one could read them long and be assured of safety in the higher sphere."

"I think I remember the book," Mrs. Money said; "I think you lent it to me, Laura; but it did not strike me as containing any doctrines of a dangerous kind. It did, indeed, protest in powerful accents against the system under which this country is rushing to her destruction."

"I dare not read it, dearest Theresa; I dare not, indeed; it would unhinge my mind. But I dare not read any poems now."

Lady Limpenny presently rose to go; but she paused even in the act of making her adieux, and, taking Lucy's hand in a manner of the tenderest affection, she asked:

"But now, darling, what is this I hear about you? Is it true, this very delightful piece of news—at least, delightful if it *is* true? Do tell me, dearest; it can't be always kept a secret, you know."

Lucy tried to get her hand away; the unconscious Lady Limpenny retained it as if she were a privileged lover. Lucy could only look away and try to keep as composed as possible.

"Really, I don't know what you mean, Lady Limpenny. I don't know what the news is; and so I don't know whether it is delightful or not."

"You very very naughty, sly little thing! So you won't tell even such an old friend? Well, your mamma won't be so naughty, I am sure. I'll come in and talk to her to-morrow or next day, when I am quite sure that you are not here. Oh, indeed, I will! I am sure now it *is* true; and I offer you my congratulations."

Mrs. Money seemed as if she would try to interpose some protest against Lady Limpenny's conclusions; but there was no possibility of stopping that lady, or of correcting any apprehensions she might have formed. She gathered her skirts about her and was gone, chattering all the time, before anyone could put in a word of explanation, and firmly convinced that she knew all the truth about everything, and that her way of exhibiting it must have been delightful to everybody.

Her display of knowledge was certainly not pleasing to Lucy Money in this instance. She seemed greatly annoyed, and, when Lady Limpenny had gone, she left the room and hid herself away somewhere. Mr. Money came home almost immediately, and his wife took the opportunity of expressing some of her fears to him about Lady Limpenny's talk and Lucy's way of taking it.

"She's quite put out by it, Money dear, I do assure you. I never saw her so much hurt by anything of the kind before."

"I wish that silly old Laura Limpenny didn't talk in that way," Money said with more earnestness in his manner than the talk of Lady Limpenny might have seemed to be worth. "It annoys Lucy, of course; and then, what she said here she will say in half a dozen places before the day is over."

"But, Money dear, it can't always be kept a secret. These things always do get talked about. I really don't see what harm it does even if they were."

"No, perhaps not; in an ordinary case, perhaps not. But somehow I don't like it in this case. I wish nothing had been said. Do you think Lucelet is quite happy, Theresa?"

"Surely, dear, I should think so—oh, yes, she must be happy, very happy. Of course it is a trial—all girls feel it so, especially when they are brought up so much at home."

Mr. Money seemed unusually grave. He stood and beat time on his chin with his fingers.

"I don't know," he said, "somehow; but I think everything is not quite right with the little girl. She *is* fond of him?" he asked, turning abruptly to his wife.

"Oh, yes, dear—she adores him."

"Yes? You think so? Well, I am sure I think so too; I was quite certain of it. Of course she is young, and girls often don't know their own minds a bit—no, confound it, nor boys either, for that matter. I think at one time she used to be fond of that fellow Blanchet; and now she does not care twopence about him. I say, Theresa, if this should be the same sort of thing?"

"But, my dear, it isn't; you may be quite sure of that. I can tell you that for certain. Why, only look at her eyes when he is near! and Lucy has told me again and again that she never thought about Mr. Blanchet in that sort of way."

"Yes, I have watched her, Theresa, as you say, and I have looked at her eyes and all that; and I did believe, certainly, that it was quite a different thing this time. If I hadn't thought it—my good heavens!—should I have meddled or made in the affair?"

Mr. Money walked uneasily up and down the room once or twice. His wife looked at him anxiously, but she did not quite follow his meaning or appreciate his alarms She was indeed, at the moment, engaged in thinking whether something could not be done to make the life of poor Mr. Blanchet a little more happy than it seemed at present to be. She was convinced in her heart that Blanchet must be suffering keenly on account of Lucy, and, as the helper of unhappy men, she burned with a wish to do something for him. She had so completely made up her mind that Lucy was having all her desire in life, and, having it, must be satisfied, that all her anxiety on her daughter's behalf seemed to have come to an end, and her cares properly reverted to the outer world.

"Yes, I thought it was all right." Mr. Money suddenly came to a stop in his walk. "I had not the least idea that it was not all right; but then one doesn't know—at least, *I* don't—whether it isn't a peculiarity of girls that when you get for them what they want, then, by Jove, they don't want it any more: and I tell you, Theresa, I have been thinking of this a good deal lately—in the last few days."

There are, perhaps, women who might have been disposed to remark to Mr. Money that anyhow the affair was pretty well all his own doing. There are women who possibly would have given him no better comfort than the reminder that they had not advised him to do the things he had done; and that, perhaps, if he had sought the advice of his wife a little more, the result might have been more satisfactory. Mrs. Money had no ideas of the kind. Even if she had known more clearly than she did the meaning of his alarm, it would never have occurred to her to doubt that he had done the very best thing possible under any given circumstances. If things went wrong after that, it must be the fault of the things; it could not be the fault of Mr. Money.

The talk was interrupted for the present by the arrival of visitors, for this was one of Mrs. Money's days of reception. Presently Lucy herself returned. Mr. Money drew her aside, and asked her one or two casual questions. Then he said suddenly, and fixing his eyes on his daughter, without giving her any time to think of herself or to conceal her feelings:

"Isn't Victor coming here to-day, Lucelet?"

The eyes of the girl sparkled again as she answered, and his eyes watched her answer:

"Oh, yes, papa dear; I expect him every moment; you don't think he is not coming, do you?"

The smile that sometimes made Mr. Money's rough face look almost handsome came over it as he saw the expression in his daughter's eyes. He took Lucy playfully by the chin.

"I should think he was coming indeed, Lucelet; I rather think you know more about his movements than I do. So Laura Limpenny has been talking her nonsense!"

Lucy coloured.

"Oh, yes, papa dear. I wish that dreadful woman did not come here; she talks of such things; it is humiliating to hear oneself talked about in that way."

"Oh, that's all, is it? don't you mind her talk, Lucelet; it can't be helped, anyhow; and remember that if you were a princess all the gossips of Europe would be talking about you."

Then he left his daughter and went to talk to some one else, somewhat relieved in his mind for the moment. He watched his Lucelet, however, all the time.

Presently he saw her eyes light up and her cheeks colour, and then her eyes droop again; and she looked wonderfully pretty, he thought,—and so, indeed, might anyone else have thought as well who happened to see her just then. If any one of us looking on might have admired the expression on the pretty girl's crimsoning face, what admiration must he have felt for whom that brightening colour came and those eyes sparkled?—the king for whom—as Lady Castlewood so prettily said—that red flag was displayed? For Mr. Money knew, before he had seen any new-comer enter the room, that the visitor whose coming caused all that brightness was the member for the borough of Keeton. Victor Heron had entered the room, and was already talking to Lucy.

Victor, then, had won everything for which he strove, and something too for which he had not striven. He had won a brilliant and an unexpected victory. Never before in the memory of man had the borough of Keeton been represented by a Liberal. There was nothing else of any particular interest going on in politics, and the attention of the country had really been turned for some days very keenly on Keeton. The riot, the family quarrel, the fact that Heron had to fight against family influences, Tory influences, and the red republicans all at once, had made his enterprise seem so dashing that, even if he had lost, he would have got a certain repute by it. But, when it was found that he had positively won, he became the hero of the hour with the public, while with his own party he was a person to be made the very most of, and applauded to the echo. No fear of his not finding men of mark to take up his grievance now.

The adventurous St. Paul had kept his word. Nothing but his intervention could possibly have carried the place for Victor, or kept poor Sheppard out of Parliament. Coming just at the right moment, St. Paul had caught the affections of the fierce democrats, the proletairiate with the dash of atheist in it, and had drawn the voters away from Sheppard. Many of them had determined to give their votes rather for the man whom they called their outspoken enemy—the Tory, that is to say—than for the doubtful friend, as every professing Liberal seemed to them to be who could not go all the way with the social revolution and them. St. Paul captivated enough of them to leave Sheppard solely to the support of the thorough Tories, who had no grievance against the ducal family; and the result was that Victor Heron won the election, or had it thus won for him without his knowledge or consent. Not the faintest suspicion of "a put-up thing" existed in any mind. It was perfectly well known in Keeton and elsewhere that Victor Heron had positively refused to have anything to do with St. Paul, and that they had all but quarrelled; and, indeed, the general opinion was that St. Paul had undertaken his candidature for the sake of spoiling Victor's chance. He fancied, people thought, that the extreme "rads" or "reds" might give their votes to Victor for lack of any stronger Liberal, and he therefore cut in between merely for the sake of destroying the game of the man who would not accept his assistance. A great many people were amused at his folly and his odd miscalculation; and even Money wondered how he could have been so badly advised, and how be could have failed to see that in what he did he was playing Victor's game and not spoiling it.

Victor Heron, then, has won, and is on the high road to be a political and a social success, and to have his grievance set right now, if he cares about it or has time to think about it any more. It is said that he is to be married to Mr. Money's pretty daughter, who will have a great fortune, people are certain; to say nothing of the fact that Money has no son, and that at his death most of his property will probably go to his rising son-in-law. Truly does young Heron seem to many persons a man who has dropped from the clouds to fall into fortune. A disappointed politician of sixty who started with splendid self-conceit, good abilities, and very fair chances, and with all has come to nothing, draws the moral of his personal failure from the story he hears of Victor Heron's success. "You see, he can do what I never could do," he says; "he can entertain the party. I defy any man to make his way in political life in a country like this if he has not the means to entertain his party, and this fellow will be able to do that with the girl's fortune and what Money must leave him some time."

It is true, then, what the people say—what Lady Limpenny has been so broadly hinting at? It was, then, as Minola Grey supposed? See, she herself has just come in, and is talking with Mr. Money now. She seems full of spirits; at least, she is talking in a very animated way. A lady who is present has already remarked, in a low tone, to another lady, that she thinks Miss Grey talks too much, and is too sarcastic for a young person. Was it as Minola supposed, and did the influence of the moonlight and the walk home *that* night in the park at Keeton prove too much for the inflammable heart of Victor Heron? No ; that night had passed over, and although Heron had felt the influence of the place, the hour, and the circumstances, he had not been able to understand his own feelings clearly enough to give them expression in words or in acts. It was when he came in fresh from the excitement of the Keeton riot, and when he saw that Lucy, who with all her love for her father had borne up gallantly against the sight of his hurts, became faint the moment she caught a glimpse of Heron's wounded face, and had to be taken from the room —it was then that the truth was borne in upon Heron for the first time, and he was made aware that Lucy Money loved him. He was almost overwhelmed by the discovery. This was something of which he had never thought. It was all true what he had said to Minola Grey that long-past day in Regent's Park—he had really had a sort of goddess theory about women. He had lived so much out of the world of fashion, and of what we call life, that he had no chance of having his ideal destroyed. If the few Englishwomen whom he met in a far colony—the wives and daughters of elderly, experienced officials, and such like—were not all that his fancy painted womanhood, he had always the conviction to fall back upon that these were not fair illustrations of the maids or the matrons of merry England at home. He had always thought of a woman as a being whom a man courted and served, and at last, by immense exercise of devotion and merit of all kinds, persuaded to listen while he told her of his deep and reverent love. It had not occurred to him to think that sometimes, even among the maids of merry England, the woman makes the love, and the man only puts up with it. When it flashed upon his mind that Lucy Money loved him, he was like one to whom some wholly new and unexpected conditions of life have suddenly revealed themselves. He felt, in a strange sort of way, stricken humble by the thought that so sweet and good a girl could love him, and wish to trust her life into his hands. Is it any wonder if, in the flush of his shame and his gratitude, he told himself that he was in love with her?

# CHAPTER XXVI.

## "LUCKLESS LOVE'S INTERPRETER."

THE event in which so much success had fallen to the share of Victor Heron had not, on the whole, turned out badly for his rival, Mr. Sheppard. The latter had lost the election, it is true, but he had made a certain repute for himself as a Conservative candidate. He was now before the eyes of his party and the country as one who had fought a good fight, who had made sacrifices for his cause, and who therefore ought to be considered when another vacancy brought an opportunity of choosing and supporting a candidate. Mr. Sheppard's name was in the political playbill, and that was something. After the defeat of Novara, Count Cavour, then only a rising politician, remarked that Piedmont had gained enough to compensate for all her losses in having got the right to hoist the national flag. Mr. Sheppard had got by his defeat the right to hoist the flag of his party, to be one of its bearers, and that was something. He was now looked upon everywhere as a man sure to be seen in Parliament before long.

Mr. Sheppard made arrangements for the carrying on of his business by other hands than his, and he came to live in London. He took handsome lodgings in a western street, not far from where Victor Heron lived. He was elected a member of a new Conservative club, and apparently he went about the task of getting into society, at least into the political dinner-parties and crowded drawing-rooms of society. In that which he had set out to himself as the great object of his life he was not, as we have seen, by any means despondent. He saw that he had greatly risen in the good opinion of Minola Grey. She had never been so kind and respectful to him as during the contest at Keeton. Always before she had treated him with contempt, which she took no trouble to hide; then, for the first time, she had shown some respect and even regard for him. He settled himself in London, a hopeful and almost a confident man as regarded alike his ambition and his love. He could afford to wait, he said to himself. He cultivated as much as possible the acquaintanceship of Mr. Money and of Victor Heron, whom, it is needless to say, he no longer regarded with any feelings of jealousy. Mr. Money and every one else admitted that nothing could be more manly and creditable than Sheppard's manner of taking his defeat. Minola seldom heard him spoken of but with respect.

The women are not many on whom the public opinion of those immediately around them has no influence in determining their estimate of a man. Minola began to see that there were qualities in her old lover for which she had not given him credit. This, indeed, she had seen for herself during the contest at Keeton. He had, at all events, a certain manly dignity, even if he was slow and formal. She may, too, have been impressed in certain moods with the strength and patience of his feelings for her. In some melancholy moments she felt a sympathy for him, and found a sort of sad amusement in admitting to herself that she and her old lover were alike in one part of their destiny, at all events. But she was sincerely glad to hear that Sheppard was beginning to go out a good deal, and she had a strong hope and conviction that in society he must very soon get over his old feelings for her. All that was natural enough, she thought, when they both lived in the country, and he knew very few women; but here in London he must meet with many girls a thousand times more attractive—so she was honestly convinced—than she could possibly appear even to the most prejudiced eye, and he would soon get over the weakness that exalted a country girl into a heroine and a goddess. He would meet with women who knew the world—the world of politics and of society—who could assist a man in his public career and in his natural ambition, and some one of whom would doubtless be found to marry him. The thought gave Minola sincere gratification.

Some of this is told a little in anticipation; for we are, as yet, in the first few weeks that followed the Keeton election. There is one, nay, there are two, of the personages most prominent to our eyes in that contest, of whom we have some account to render before the story resumes its regular march.

Poor Herbert Blanchet found himself a man sadly changed in his own estimate when the subsidence of the riot in the Keeton streets left him stranded high and dry, and still alive. Not only was he alive, but he was absolutely uninjured. The dignity of the slightest wound was not on him to make him interesting. All that commotion that had seemed to him so terrible that his very soul shrank from it, turned out to be, so far as he was concerned, more innocent and harmless than a schoolboy game of wrestling. He had been ridiculous when shrinking from the riot, and he now felt that he must have been ridiculous when by sheer force he mastered his quivering nerves and threw himself literally into it. In the very thick of the battle, and when he came to Heron's aid, he thought he saw an inclination to good-humoured laughter on Heron's face at the sight of him and his weapon. When the riot was over, and the crowd began to disperse, and the Liberal leaders went into the hotel, nobody took any notice of him. He seemed to be of no account in the eyes of any one. Men whose companion he had been during his share of the campaign in Keeton passed him rapidly by and did not seem to recognise him; they were all thinking of other things and other persons, clearly. Even Heron, to whose help he had come, did not think it worth his while apparently to make any inquiry about him.

We know, of course, that Heron did find time and thought to ask about the poet; but the poet did not know this. The thought, however, which most disturbed Blanchet's mind was not that Heron had been ungrateful to him, but that clearly, in the mind of men like Heron, the whole affair was a matter of no moment—an ordinary event at an election, involving an amount of danger such as men encounter in their huntings and their other pastimes of which Blanchet knew little, and not enough to be seriously thought of a moment after it was past. It was, then, for danger such as this that the poet had twice made himself ridiculous in the eyes of Minola Grey. It was for danger like this that he had exposed himself to hear from her the bitterest words that man can hear from woman. In truth, it is not certain that poor Blanchet was really a coward. He had been put suddenly in front of a sort of trial entirely new to him, and his physical nerves had shrunk from it at first. He had not a virile nature; he had none of the strong animal spirits which carry so many men through all manner of danger without giving them time to think about it. He had not much, if we may say so, of the English nature in him; of that cool, strong, unimaginative nature which takes all tasks set to it very much as a matter of course, and goes at them accordingly to win or lose. When Nature was making Herbert Blanchet, there was for some reason or other a little too much of the feminine material put into his composition. We often see these slight mistakes on the part of Nature. We meet with a tall and bearded creature in whom a superabundance of the feminine is always showing itself; we find some pretty and delicate being in whom the judgment, the inclinations, the way of looking at things, are all unmistakably masculine. Blanchet had not lived a manly life; he had, indeed, not lived a life that would be wholesome for man or woman. It was not, be it understood, harmful or immoral, as lives are accounted on our somewhat dwarfed and formal principles of social good or harm; but it was a life without bracing strength of any kind. It was a life of sickly affectations and debauching conceits. It made sham as good as effort. In that sort of life it sufficed to think yourself a great person, and to say to your friends that you were so, and there was no occasion for the long, healthy, noble labour that, with whatever genius, is needed to develop success. It was a life of ghastly groping after originality; a life in which one became fantastic, not out of superabundant fancy, but of set purpose. The moment an entirely new situation was presented to Blanchet, and he was called upon to act under circumstances not previously thought out and reduced to theatric form, all the shams were suddenly blown away, and the weakly, naked nature was left shivering and shuddering in the rough, unaccustomed air of reality.

Little Mary Blanchet was sitting alone the day after the riot at Keeton. It was drawing on towards evening, and she had her books of manuscript out on the table and was at work at her poems. She was very particular about the copying of her poems; she began a long poem in a bound volume with ruled leaves, and if, in copying, she made any mistake, even of a word, she put that volume aside and began another. Therefore the one poem at which she was now engaged had already produced several of these manuscript books, without itself approaching much nearer to completion. She was seated before the work with her pen in her mouth and her eyes fixed on the ceiling, and was in a little doubt between a rhyme which was of excellent sound but doubtful grammar, and one of which the grammar was all right but the sound was open to challenge. Her own sympathies went altogether with the good rhyme, and she was strongly inclined to run the risk of being a little superior for once to those narrow grammatical rules which offend so many poetesses. While thus, like the Achilles of Pope's Homer, "in anguish of suspense delayed," she was told that her brother wished to see her.

Mary sprang up in excitement, let her ink-steeped pen fall on her book, thus reducing a new volume to worthlessness, and, scarcely stopping even for a plaintive murmur, ran out and brought Herbert Blanchet into the room. She was convinced that he must have some important intelligence. Could it be that he had proposed for Minola, been accepted, and had come back to London in all speed to arrange for the wedding? His face, however, did not look like that; it was haggard and miserable, and the poet had evidently not slept the past night. Mary felt her heart sink within her as she looked at him.

Blanchet sat down and passed his hands wildly through his unkempt hair—hair that, however, looked so beautiful, Mary thought.

"Well, my sister," he said, with a gloomy effort at being light and careless of speech, "I have come back, you see."

"What has happened, Herbert dear?" the affrighted old maid asked; and she trembled all over.

"Nothing particular, Mary; only that your brother has made a fool of himself."

Then he smiled in a dismal way, with ghastly lips and livid face; and then he put his hands to his forehead, and burst into tears.

Never was a woman more frightened than poor Mary. She had never seen a man in tears before; she remembered having read and shudderingly admired a line in a poem of Mrs. Hemans's, in which she, Mary Blanchet, and all the world in general were advised not to talk of grief until they had seen the tears of bearded men. Poor Mary always thought that the tears of bearded men must be something very dreadful to see; but she never expected to see them, for she did not think it possible that Englishmen, the only race of men she knew, could shed tears under any provocation. Now she was compelled to look on the tears of a bearded man whom she dearly loved; and she found that Mrs. Hemans's suggestions fell far short of the dreadful reality. She tried all she could to comfort her broken-hearted brother; but comfort is particularly unavailing when one does not even know the source of the trouble. It was some time before poor Blanchet could give his sister any coherent account of his distress. When the story was told, however, it did not seem so hopeless to Mary as she had expected. He had not been refused by Minola; he had not even proposed to her. She did not attach much importance to the fact that Minola had supposed him—wrongfully, of course—to be a coward. He could easily prove, if indeed he had not done it already, that he was as brave as she, Mary, knew her brother must be. It was wrong of Minola to judge so quickly and so harshly, and very unlike Minola; but, after all, what did it prove but the deep interest which she took in Herbert? She was disappointed when she thought he was not all that she had expected. What did that prove but that she had expected great things? Well, it was not by any means too late to prove that her first expectations were true estimates of Mary's brother.

It is a truth that Herbert Blanchet gradually became encouraged, and almost restored, if not to his good opinion of himself, yet to his hopes. It was wonderful what a person of importance, a wise counsellor, a trusty friend, his sister grew to be in his eyes all at once. How long is it since he thought her an absurd little old maid in whom no person of artistic soul could possibly feel any interest? How long is it since he fully believed that Minola Grey was kind to her partly out of pity, and partly because it looked picturesque and charming for a handsome young woman to be the patroness and friend of an unattractive elderly woman? How long is it since he was ashamed of the relationship, and would gladly have given Minola to understand that he considered his sister only a poor little, old-fashioned person, whose pretences at poetry and art had his entire disapproval? And now he wept upon her faithful bosom, and drew comfort from her flattering but very sincere assurances; and poured out his feelings over and over again; and asked her to tell him over and over again this, that, and the other thing that Minola had said; and found comfort in her talk; and would rather have been in her company that evening than in the centre of the beloved school, or in the drawing-room of a lady of rank. If poor little Mary could have thought of such a thing as being revenged upon her brother for all his long neglect, his selfish desertion of her, she might have found herself well avenged that night when he clung to her, and hung upon her words, and was only restored to think life worth having by her flatteries and her promises that she would do all for him, and had good hope to make everything come right even yet.

So far as Mary was concerned, she had hardly ever been so happy. It was enough to make her happy at any time to know that she was of importance to her poet-brother. But she had also now from him the confession of his passionate love for her friend. It had always smote a little on Mary's conscience that, in helping her brother in his scheme about Minola, she was not quite certain whether, after all, the poet really loved Minola as Mary thought Minola deserved to be loved. Now she was satisfied on this point. Herbert had poured out his whole heart to her, and had showed her that his love for Minola was deep, passionate, eternal. It did not occur to Mary to suspect that there could be a woman on earth, even Minola, who was capable of rejecting the love of a man like Herbert Blanchet. That was Mary Blanchet's happiest night thus far in London; her happiest night thus far in life.

In his misery Blanchet had told the truth. He was really in love with Minola. He had gone in for money and a beautiful wife, and he had lost himself hopelessly in the game. His self-conceit had readily made him believe that the handsome, simple country girl who thought so much of his sister must fall in love with him. It was only by degrees it dawned upon him that there was a clear strength in Minola's character such as he had thought no women ever had. He began to see that she was friendly to him, but otherwise unconcerned; and that he was fairly in love with her. He began to be ashamed of the pitiful hopes he had formed about her money; he began to be ashamed of a good deal of his character and career. The genuine extravagance of the delight which he felt when she enabled him to put his poems before the world in such splendid dress, had almost as strange an effect on him as the gift of the bishop's candlesticks on poor Jean Valjean. It shook all his previous theories of life and its philosophy, to find that there was so much of simple generosity in the world; especially to find it in the heart of a girl over whom his charms and his affectations seemed to have no manner of influence. He found that he had his world to reconstruct. He went home and passed some wretched days. He looked back on his life, its theories, its affectations, its pitiful little vanities, and he wondered how he could ever have thought to make genuine poetry out of such shams of emotion and simulacra of beauty. It would require fairy power indeed to spin such rubbish of straws into gold.

Still, he had some hopes from Mary and her influence over Minola. It had come to that; his sister now was his chief resource and his star of hope. The artful Mary was not long in bringing her plans to maturity and to proof.

"Minola, dear," she said one evening after Miss Grey had settled down in London again, "do you really never think of getting married?"

"Never, Mary; why should I, if I don't like?"

"Well, you can't live always alone in this kind of way."

"But I am not living alone in any kind of way."

"Not now; not exactly now. But I may not live, you know; I don't feel at all like myself lately; and I shudder at the idea of your being left alone. I am so much older than you, Minola."

"But, Mary, my dear little poetess, if you think marriage such a good thing, why didn't you marry?"

Mary sighed, and cast at her leader a look of gentle, melancholy reproach.

"Ah! there were reasons for my not marrying which happily don't exist for you. And then my life would be a wretched one, Minola, but for you. Where are you to get a Minola, dear, when you come to be as old as I am now?"

The prospect of growing old never frightens the young. It is their conviction that, at worst, they will die before that comes about. It was not, therefore, the thought of becoming like Mary Blanchet, that made Minola seem melancholy for the moment. It was the thought of the weariness that life must have for her in any case, young or not. She remained thinking for a second or two, until she became conscious that Mary was waiting for her to say something. Then she tried to get rid of the subject.

"Well, Mary, at all events I need not trouble myself about marriage just at this moment; I don't want to be like the girl in the old song, who refused the men before they asked her. No one has been asking me lately."

"I know some one," Mary broke out, "who would ask you if he dared. I know some one who loves you—who adores you."

Minola looked round in amazement. It did not occur to her at the moment to think of what or whom poor Mary meant.

Mary rose from her chair and ran to Minola, and threw herself on the ground near her in supplication, with her eyes full of tears.

"It's my brother, Minola; it's my brother! He adores you. He would die for you. He will die for you if you won't listen to him. Oh, do listen to him, darling, and make us all happy!"

Minola rose from her chair in such anger as she had seldom known before. She was not even particularly careful how she extricated herself from Mary's clinging grasp.

"Are you speaking seriously, Mary?" she asked, in a low tone, and with determined self-restraint.

"Oh, Minola darling, it's only too serious! He was here the other day. He is wretched, he is miserable, because he thinks you were angry with him. I thought he would die—I think he will die. He didn't want to tell any one; but a sister's eyes can't be deceived. And it's no use, and he so loves you."

Minola could have found it in her heart to curse Love and all his works. This distracting revelation was too much for her. It was utterly unexpected. She had never for a moment thought of this. Herbert Blanchet had always seemed to her a person to help and pity, and sometimes to be angry with and despise. Even if she had been a vain girl, it is not likely that the announcement of his love would have gratified her vanity.

"Did he send you to tell me this, Mary?"

"No, dear," Mary said humbly, losing heart and hope with every moment, as she looked into Minola's face, which was pale, and cold, and almost hard in its expression. "No, dear; but I thought it would be better, perhaps, if I were just to speak to you a little about it first, just to know how you felt, and then I might perhaps encourage him or not, you know; and I thought that might not be so unpleasant, perhaps, Minola."

"You are right, Mary; it is much less unpleasant. But I think I need not give you any further answer, need I?"

Minola's manner was strangely cold and hard. She could not help feeling as if there were something like treachery in this secret arrangement of brother and sister to try to persuade her into a marriage which she would otherwise never have thought of. Both brother and sister seemed for the moment mean in her eyes; and Minola hated meanness.

Mary looked wistfully into her leader's cold, stern face. It must be said for Minola that the coldness and sternness came from disappointment rather than from anger. It seemed to her that her closest friend had betrayed her.

"Is there no hope for him?" Mary asked, faintly.

"I wish you would not talk in that foolish way," Minola said coldly. "It is not worthy of you. It ought to be no hope to any man that a girl who does not love him or think about him in any such way should marry him. And if a man is so silly, his sister ought to have better wishes for him. *I* would not degrade my brother—if I could say I had one and were fond of him—by speaking of him in such a way. I hope your brother has more sense, Mary, and more spirit, than you seem to think."

"He so loves you, Minola; he does indeed," Mary feebly pleaded.

"If he really loves me—and I hate to use the word, and I hate to hear it—I am sorry for him, Mary; and I am ashamed of him, and I feel a contempt for him, and that's all. I hate to think of men grovelling in that way, or of women either; but I do think that if women are such idiots, they, generally at least, have the spirit to hide their folly and not to degrade themselves."

"But, Minola, a man must speak some time, you know, or how can he tell?" Mary argued, plucking up a little spirit on behalf of her misprized brother.

"Your brother might have known perfectly well. He must have known. What word did I ever say to him that could make him think I cared for him? Do you think, if a girl cares for a man, and wants him to know it, she doesn't let him see it? I believe," Minola added, in her bitterness, and with a meaning known only to herself, "women have trouble enough to hide their feelings even when they don't want them to be known."

With this word she left the room abruptly, and would hear no more.

So ended poor Mary Blanchet's first attempt to plead the love-cause of her brother.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### "WAS EVER WOMAN IN THIS HUMOUR WOOED?"

THE days were not pleasant for Minola or Mary which followed this disclosure. The two friends for a time did not seem as if they were the same persons; there was a cold constraint between them. Minola soon got over her anger to poor Mary, and was only angry with herself for having spoken harshly to the unhappy old maid; but she could not revive the confidence that had existed between them before. She felt that between them now was something that killed confidence. She tried to speak to her companion in tones and words if possible more kindly and friendly than ever; but the genial heart of friendship which makes mere words into sweet realities was hardly there any more.

Mary Blanchet was not very good at disguising her feelings. Even from Minola, whom she loved, and of whom she stood in some awe, she made little effort to conceal the fact that she felt herself a sufferer. The curse in the dead man's eye, which told so heavily on the Ancient Mariner, was far more bitter, doubtless, than the silent reproach in Mary's eye; but Minola was much oppressed by the latter. She felt as if she had been doing some wrong to Mary and to the cause of friendship and common sisterly womanhood; and, like all generous natures, she was disposed, when the heat of anger and surprise was over, to throw all the blame on herself, or at least to be troubled with the fear that she must have been to blame. She began to long for a full reconciliation with Mary. She reproached herself with having brought the poetess away from her home and her friends at Keeton; as if poor Mary had any home there, or any friends there or elsewhere, except Minola herself.

"I am going to see my brother," Mary Blanchet said one evening, not without a gentle reproach in her voice.

"Yes, Mary? I am glad. You will give him my regards—my very kind regards—will you not?"

"Oh, yes; certainly, if you wish it." This was followed by a little sigh, as if Mary would have said, "I don't think there is much comfort in that, if that is all."

Minola looked up and saw the melancholy little face. She was greatly touched. She thought of their long friendship, going back to the days when she was a little child, and regarded Mary as another Elizabeth Barrett. She remembered her own brother and her love for him, and her heart was pierced by the expression in Mary's face. She went to the poetess and put her arms round her neck, and the poor poetess fairly gave way and was drowned in tears.

"It's so unhappy; it's all so unhappy," sobbed Mary. "I never thought it would come to this. I can't bear to think of him so, and that he should be so wretched; I can't, indeed."

Minola waited for a while to let this grief have way; and, indeed, it must be owned that her own tears were hard enough to restrain. Then, when the passion of the poetess had a little abated, and Minola thought she could listen to reason, she began to reason gently, very gently.

"I know you blame me for this, Mary, my dear old friend, even when you try not to show it. But tell me, Mary, where am I to blame? You know I don't want to marry, and you know I ought not to marry any one if I don't—if I don't love him, dear. I do not love your brother in that way; and it would be doing him a great wrong if I were to marry him merely because I was fond of you, you foolish, kind old Mary. *He* would only feel offended by such an idea; and quite right. I almost wish I could marry him, dear, for your sake, and for the sake of all the old times and the pleasant days we have had together, and the evenings, and the confidences—all the dear old times! But you would not ask me to do that, Mary? you would not let me do it, if I were inclined?"

Mary sobbed a doubtful assent to this proposition. It is to be feared she felt in her own heart that she would be glad if her friend would marry her brother on any account.

"You don't know what it is to me," Mary murmured out, "to see him so unhappy."

"But, my dear, that won't last always; he will get over that. I am not so foolish, Mary dear, as to believe that there is anything in me which your brother will not find in twenty other girls."

"But that's because you don't believe he has any strong feelings at all," Mary said, reproachfully. "You do him wrong, Minola. You don't mean it, I know; but you do him wrong. He has strong feelings, indeed he has. Don't you think *I* know?"

Minola might, perhaps, with truth have said that she had no profound reliance on Mary's power of reading character even in the case of her brother; but she did not touch that point.

"I am sure he has strong feelings, Mary; I am sure of it now. I didn't think so once, perhaps—you are quite right in that—but I am sure now that I was mistaken. I have a great regard for your brother; much too great a regard," she added, with a certain bitterness in her tone, "to believe he could waste much of his life in idle regret because a girl like me did not marry him."

"It's all very well for you, Minola," Mary said, raising her head and throwing something like downright anger into her voice; "it's all very well for you, who don't have any of these feelings. You don't care for any one—in that way, I mean. You don't care for any man. Other people can't have such strong feelings."

Minola broke down. Why she did so, only the benign powers that understand human and especially womanly weaknesses can tell; certainly Minola never could explain. She had gone through ordeals, one might have thought, far worse than this, and kept a serene face and her secret safe. But there was something in this unjust reproach coming from the poor old friend whom she had known so long, and for whom she had persistently done so much, that quite overcame her. The words found out the very heart of her womanhood and her weakness ; the place where her emotions had no steel plates of caution ready put on to protect them. Half in tears, half in hysterical laughter, she broke away from Mary.

"Oh, you unjust, silly, foolish old Mary ! It's not true a word that you are saying. I am as great a fool as *he*, and as you, and as all the rest, I suppose ! Don't I know what such feelings are? Oh, how I wish I didn't ! "

Mary looked up in utter amazement.

"Why, Minola darling, it *can't* be——"

"But I tell you it can be and it is, Mary—and now do let me alone for the future. Oh, yes, I *am* in love—up to the roots of my hair, dear, if you like the words—I can't think of any other. There, I have made a fool of myself and humbled myself enough for one day, I think ! Now go and see your brother, like a good, dear creature, and leave me to myself for a little. Don't ask me to tell you any more ; if I ever do tell you any more, it shan't be now. I hate and despise myself for all this ; but it's true, Mary, as true as death, or any other certain thing you like."

Then Minola turned away, and resolutely sat down to the piano and began to play. Mary knew that there was nothing more to be got out of her just then ; and, indeed, she was too much overwhelmed by what she had heard to have any clear purpose of extorting more. She made her preparations to go out in silence ; but the very manner in which she tied her bonnet-strings gave expression, somehow, to a sound of wonder. She went out with no other good-bye to Minola than was conveyed by a gentle pressure on her shoulder as she passed, meant to express all a world of renewed sympathy, fellowship, and devotion.

It could hardly be said that Mary had yet had breathing-time enough to allow her to begin forming any conjecture as to the person who must needs be involved in Minola's bewildering confidence. The revelation itself filled her mind for a while, to the exclusion of all other thought. But, as she was going along the street, she saw coming towards her a figure which, even with her short sight, she thought she recognised. It was that of a man taller than any one else she knew, even than her brother, and who had stooping shoulders and a walk of lounging complacency—a walk as of one who rather fancied that all the street belonged to him. When this person came near he raised his hat and made a bow of recognition to Mary, and then the poetess saw that she was not wrong in supposing that it was Mr. St. Paul. He was evidently going in the direction of Minola's lodgings. A sudden thought flashed upon Mary Blanchet's mind.

"Can it be *he*?" she thought. "I should never have supposed such a thing. But he was very attentive to her, certainly; and of course he is a man of high family—not like poor Herbert. But I never should have thought of him."

While Mary went her melancholy and meditative way, Mr. St. Paul arrived at Minola's door, and asked to see her, adding that he came to take leave, and would not keep her long. The servants at Minola's lodgings had an immense awe and veneration for Mr. St. Paul. When he called there once before and saw Minola, on the day of the unholy compact, Mary, having heard of the visit, could not keep down the pride of her heart, but let out the fact that he was a duke's brother. In that quiet region the brothers of dukes are rare visitors, and it was not likely that the face and form of this one could have been forgotten. Therefore, even if Minola had taken the precaution to say that she would see no one that day, it is very doubtful whether the servants would have understood this general order to apply to a duke's brother. Anyhow, it was intimated to Minola, in tones of some awe, that the gentleman who was a duke's brother wanted very particularly to see her.

Minola was not in spirits for enjoying the visits of dukes, not to say of the brothers of dukes. But she felt that she really owed some thanks to Mr. St. Paul; and she had never seen him since the night of the Keeton riot; and if he was really going away, she did not wish him to go without a word of thanks from her. It may be said, too, that, in spite of all his defects and his odd ways, Minola rather liked him. There was a sort of reckless honesty about him; and his talk was not commonplace. So she agreed to see him, not without a dread that there might still be traces of the tears which had lately been in her eyes. "What does it matter," she asked of herself in scorn of her own weaknesses, "even if he does see? I suppose he knows very well that women are always in tears about something."

"Well, Miss Grey," he said as he came in—and he seemed positively to grow taller in the gathering dusk, like the genie in the story of Bedreddin Hassan—"I haven't seen you since the night of the row at Keeton. Wasn't it capital fun? The poet ran away, I hear; they say he never stopped until he reached London." Mr. St. Paul laughed his usual good-humoured laugh, and he held, as if unconsciously, Minola's hand a moment in his own. His manner was never a love-making one, and Minola hardly noticed this slight familiarity.

"Oh, there was no truth in all that!" she said hastily, and not without a half-smile. "Mr. Blanchet did nothing of the kind; although, like me, he does not like noisy crowds."

"Well, I kept my word, you see, Miss Grey. I sent your man in, in spite of them all."

"You did, indeed; and I ought to feel very much obliged to you, and I do feel obliged, Mr. St. Paul; although my conscience is still sadly distressed to know if I did anything very wrong in allowing you to do anything of the kind."

"Don't you mind that; it's all right; it was a much more honest trick than half the dodges by which elections are won, I can assure you. There are always wheels within wheels in these affairs, you know. You were in your rightful place too; in all these things there is sure to be a petticoat in the background. It might as well be you as any one else—as my sister-in-law, for instance."

"And you are going away, Mr. St. Paul?"

"I think so; yes. If things don't turn out as I want them to, I shall go away again, I think. I don't see what I want here; I have done my duty as a brother, you know, and kept old Sheppard, my brother's man, out of Keeton."

"Are you going back to America?"

"In the end, yes; I suppose so. But not just for the present. I feel inclined to take a run through Thibet. I am told by some fellows that the yak is the most extraordinary creature; and the place hasn't been used up. You see, Miss Grey, I have enough of money one way and another; and I am inclined to consult my own whims now a little. Come, what are you smiling at?"

"I don't feel inclined to explain, Mr. St. Paul."

"I'll do it for you—you smile because you think I never did consult any whims but my own; is not that it?"

"Yes; if I must give an answer, that was it."

"Of course; I knew it. What I meant was that I don't intend to bother any more just now about the making of money. But I do particularly want to be allowed to consult the whims of some one besides myself."

"Indeed?"

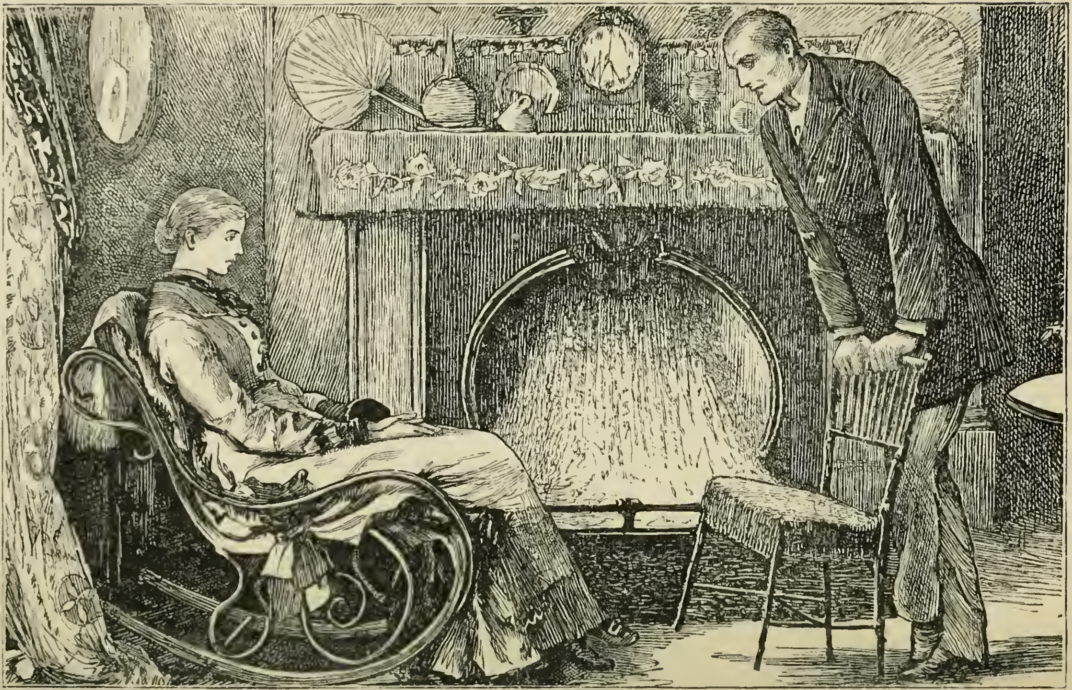
"You say that sarcastically, I know. You don't think much of us men, it seems; at least, you say you don't."

"Do you, Mr. St. Paul?"

"Do I what?"

"Think much of men?"

"Oh, no, by Jove! if you come to that. I never said I did,



" *Will you marry me?*"

nor women either. But we all like to believe, I suppose, that you women think us fine fellows and greatly admire us—that is, when you are young. Anyhow, I don't mean to discuss the defects of the human race with you just now, Miss Grey. I have come for a different purpose. But won't you sit down?"

She had not asked him to be seated; and it seemed like a mild rebuke of her lack of hospitality when Mr. St. Paul now handed her a chair. But he had no such meaning. He was positively a little embarrassed, and did not well know for a moment how to get on. Even Minola noticed the fact, and made a good-natured attempt to help him out of his difficulty, greatly amazed to find that he could have any hesitation about anything.

"You were saying that you want to consult somebody's whims, Mr. St. Paul?"

"Yes, so I was; that's what I have come about. I should like to be allowed to consult your whims, Miss Grey."

"That's very kind; but I don't know that I have any whim just at present. When there is another election coming off somewhere, then, indeed——"

St. Paul laughed. He was holding a chair. He turned it and balanced it on two of its legs, and then leaned on the top of it with both his hands in such a manner that Minola began to be afraid it would give way under his bulky pressure and send him prostrate at her feet. The odd attitude seemed, however, to give him a little more self-possession.

"Look here, Miss Grey; let's come to the point. Will you marry me?"

He now let go the chair and stood upright, looking straight at her, or rather, down upon her.

Minola felt her breath taken away. She actually started.

"That's what I am here for, Miss Grey. To come to the point at once, will you marry me?"

"To come to the point at once, Mr. St. Paul, I will not."

"Why not?" He put his hands into his pockets, and coolly waited for an answer.

"But there are so many reasons——"

"All right; tell me some of them."

"But really I don't know where to begin."

"Well, just think it over; I can wait. May I take a seat?"

"Oh, yes; pray be seated."

He sat quietly near her. His manner was now once more perfectly assured, but, with all his odd roughness, perfectly respectful.

"Now we can talk the matter regularly out, like sensible people,' he said.

The situation was new, to say the least of it. Minola began to be a little amused now that she had recovered from the first shock of her embarrassment; and she saw that with such a wooer it would be far the wisest policy to talk the matter out as he had proposed. So she began to rack her brain, not for reasons against accepting the proposal, but for the reason which ought properly to come first.

"To begin with, Mr. St. Paul, I am not sure that you are in earnest in such an offer."

"Oh, if that's all, I can easily reassure you. I am confoundedly in earnest, Miss Grey! As you say, I have generally been in the habit of pleasing myself more than other people; and the truth is, that nothing on earth would please me now half so much as for you to take me as I offer myself. But I think I shouldn't make half a bad husband, after all; and honestly, do you know, I don't believe you would be sorry in the end?"

"But why do you want to marry me? why not some other woman? why not some one in your own class?"

"My class? Fiddle-de-dee! what's my class? I am a cattle grower from Texas; I am a land speculator from California. If I had been depending on what you call my class, I shouldn't have enough now to give a girl bread and cheese, to say nothing of her milliner's bill. I have plenty of money, thanks to myself. I'm the son of my own works; I'm the son of Marengo, as what's-his-name—Napoleon—said."

"But there are so many women whom you must have met and who would be suited to you so much better——"

"Look here, Miss Grey; cut that! You are the only girl I ever saw—I mean, of course, since I was a boy—that I care a red cent for. There's something about you that other girls don't have. You have no nonsense in you, not a bit! A man need not feel ashamed of caring about you or trying to please you. I saw that long ago; you are a woman to do a man some good. You are not spoiled by society, and all that rot. I suppose you never were in society—what they call society—in your life?"

"No, Mr. St. Paul; I never was. I never was in any house in London but Mr. Money's; I suppose that isn't society?"

"Well, there it is, you see. I like a girl who is not just the same pattern as every other girl. Look here! I don't say that I am madly in love with you in that sentimental way; I suppose that sort of thing does not last at my time of life with a man who has knocked about the world as I have; but I do say that you are the pleasantest woman I know, and the cleverest, and I'm sure the best; and you are the only woman I would marry."

"But I am afraid, Mr. St. Paul, that we like to be loved in that sentimental way, we foolish girls. I don't think I could be quite pleased with anything else; and I am glad you are so candid as to tell me the whole truth." Minola now thought she saw a way of getting good-humouredly out of the affair without seeming to take it too seriously.

"Not a bit of it; you are not that sort; you have too much sense for nonsense like that. Why, just listen. I was sentimentally in love before I was quite twenty years old—I wonder what age were you then?—and I was wild to be allowed to marry a poor girl, the daughter of the fellow who taught me French. Didn't I get into a nice row at home? and the poor girl, they hunted her out of the place—my people did—as if she and her old father had been mad dogs. I dare say my people were right enough in opposing such a marriage; I dare say I should have been tired of her long ago; but if you want sentimental love and so forth, that was my time for it, and that was what it all came to."

"You are glad now you did not marry her," Minola said; "you will be glad some time that you did not marry me. I will be generous to you, Mr. St. Paul; I will not take you at your word."

"No, no! that's all nonsense; you don't understand. I only told you about that to show you how that sort of sentimental love is nothing at all. I know what I am about now; I know my own mind; it would be time for me, by Jove! Yes; I know my own mind."

"So do I; and I can't accept your offer, Mr. St. Paul."

"But you have not told me a single reason yet——"

"I don't want to marry; I had much rather remain as I am. I am not a great admirer of men in general, and I think I am more likely to be happy living as I do——"

"If you marry me," he said, "you may live in any part of the world you like, and any street you like, and any way you like."

Minola smiled. "How happily you would pass your life," she said, "living in the West Centre of London with me and Mary Blanchet!"

"Well, if the wandering fit came on me, and I wanted a rush half across the world, and you did nat care to come too, you might please yourself, and remain here with old Mary until I came back. I rather like old Mary; I met her a few moments ago."

"I fear it would not do, Mr. St. Paul."

"You bet it would—I mean, I am quite sure you and I could hit it off admirably, if you'll only give us the chance and let us try."

"But if we tried it, and did not hit it off, what then?"

"I know we should; I know it. And do you know, Miss Grey, I have often thought that you rather liked me—I don't mean the sentimental falling in love, and all that: you are too sensible a girl for that; and I'm not exactly the sort of fellow to make a woman feel in that way—but I often thought that you rather liked me, and liked to talk to me, and did not look at me with horror as if I were a sort of outcast, don't you know?"

Minola saw the great virtue of being frank and outspoken with this strange lover.

"You are quite right, Mr. St. Paul; I did rather like you, and I do still. I did like to talk with you, and I did not feel any particular alarm when you were good enough to talk to me. I fancied that you liked to talk to me——"

"You couldn't well avoid thinking that," he said with a smile; "for whenever I saw you in the corner of a room I made for you at once. I liked you from the first moment I saw you. Do you remember the day I first saw you?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. St. Paul; perfectly well."

"Come, then; tell me something about it."

"It was at Mrs. Money's one day. I was there in the drawing-room, and you came in with Mr. Money. It is not so long ago that I should forget it." Minola had other memories, too, connected with the day which she did not disclose to Mr. St. Paul, but which brought a faint colour into her cheeks.

"Yes, yes; that was the day. I had seen one of old Money's daughters—the younger one, the girl that is going to be married to that young fool Heron—and when I came into the drawing-room I thought you were the other daughter; and I said to myself that, by Jove, Money's elder daughter was worth a dozen of the other, and that I shouldn't be half sorry if she would marry me. I hadn't spoken a word to you then. So, you see, it is not an idea taken up on the spur of the moment."

"I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. St. Paul——"

He made a deprecating gesture. Minola went on:

"And I do feel indeed that you have paid me a compliment, and done me an honour. But will you take me at my word, and believe that indeed, indeed, I never could accept your offer? It is out of the question. Mr. St. Paul—I may speak out with you?—if I were in love with you, I would not marry you——"

"Why not?" he asked almost vehemently, as he confronted her.

"Well, because we are not the sort of people to be married; we have such different ways, and such different friends——"

"By the way," he struck in, "that reminds me—your speaking about friends—of something I wanted to say; I am glad I have thought of it before you made up your mind. It's this—I hear you have money, or houses, or something of that kind. Well, don't you see, if you marry me, you can give it all, whatever it is, to old Mary what's-her-name. I don't want a dollar of it; I have plenty: so just take that into account before you decide."

"Thank you, Mr. St. Paul. I should have expected some generosity from you——"

"It isn't every fellow would do it, take my word for that."

"No, I suppose not; if I gave anyone the chance. But I don't mean to do so, Mr. St. Paul. If I wished to marry I don't really know that I should refuse your offer. I am sure you would be more generous than most men, and I do like you; but, indeed, the thing is out of the question. We have no tastes or habits in common; and you would be tired of me very soon."

"Not a bit of it; we have tastes in common. I don't know any woman who can understand a joke so well as you can; and you don't always suppose everybody is in earnest, as women generally do. Most women are so dreadfully serious—don't you know?—that I find it a trial to talk to them. You are not like that."

"No," said Minola quietly; "I don't insist on people always being in earnest; and so I shan't treat you as if you were in earnest now."

"But I am in earnest; and I tell you what, Miss Grey, you must be in earnest too. I must have a serious, deliberate answer from you. I tell you on my honour, and on my oath, if you will allow me, that you are the only girl in the world I would marry; and I must be treated like a man in earnest, and have a serious answer."

"I have given you my answer already, Mr. St. Paul. I can't say anything more."

"Then you won't have me?" he asked, taking his hat from the table on which he had laid it.

"No, Mr. St. Paul."

"And this is quite serious and for the very last time?—as the children say;" and he held out one hand towards her.

She put her hand frankly into his.

"It is quite serious and for the very, very last time."

She felt a strong grip on her hand, so strong that it hurt her keenly for the moment. But she did not wince or make any attempt to draw the hand away. He released it in an instant.

"Well, I'm sorry," he said, "and that's all about it. I had hopes that I might have persuaded you, don't you know?—not that I thought a fine girl like you was likely to be in love with a fellow like me; but that I fancied you could do with me, on the whole, better than with some others. You see, I was not too self-conceited in the matter, Miss Grey. Well, that's all over, and there's an end of it. Good-bye; I dare say I shan't see you soon again. I shall be off for another run round the world. On the whole, I don't see anything better to do just now."

He was going.

"I am sorry if I have disappointed you; I am indeed," she said, and held out her hand to him again.

The bold blue eyes showed a gleam of a softer light in them.

"Oh, never mind about me, Miss Grey; I shall come all right, you needn't fear. I told you, you know, that I had outlived the age when men break their hearts; and, by Jove, a year ago I should have said I had outlived the age when I could ask any woman on earth to marry me. But I'll come all right; and I forgive you," he added with a laugh; "although at my time of life we don't like to make fools of ourselves before women. Good-bye. If you are in London when I come here next, I'll look you up; and if you want anything done then in the electioneering way, I'm your man——Hullo! here's old Mary back; I saw her passing the window. Good morning, Miss Grey; good morning."

He nodded in his old, familiar, easy way, and was out of the room somehow before Mary Blanchet got into it. Minola hardly saw how he got away. There was an odd moisture in her eyes and a swimming in her head which made it hard for her all at once to fall into talk with little Mary.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE MEMBER FOR KEETON.

"The member for Keeton!" How strange it seemed to Minola that Victor Heron should thus have come to be connected in the mind of everyone with the old home of her youth! On the day, not to be forgotten by her, when she saw him for the first time at Mr. Money's door, who could have thought that such a thing as that was likely to come to pass? Ah, who could have thought that other things yet more deeply concerning her were likely to come to pass? We may be all excused if sometimes under the pressure of some peculiar pain, or in the exaltation of some peculiar joy, we tell ourselves that there is a special fate in the things that concern us, and that the Destinies have our lives expressly in their care to gladden or to punish us. It is something of a consolation apparently to think that this trial, which we find it hard to bear, is not such as falls to the chance lot of ordinary mortals, but is set out by some special destiny for us alone. To Minola there seemed something fateful in the way in which Victor Heron had been so often and strangely made to cross her path. "The member for Keeton!"—and she had, it would seem, made him member for Keeton. In her brighter moments she was sometimes amazed and amused to think of the extraordinary part she had been made to play in the political affairs of her native town. If she had been inclined to vanity, she might have found some consolation for any disappointment of her own in the homage that had been paid to her by such different admirers. But it gave her neither pride nor pleasure to know that some men admired her whom she could not admire in turn. "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" was the thought that often filled her; and she cordially applied it to herself as well as to others. In truth, her secret love would in any case have kept her pure of vanity. Her pain gave her sympathy and made her strong.

Meanwhile the months went on, and she saw little or nothing of the member for Keeton—her member in a double sense: the representative of her borough, and returned by herself. The time of the honourable gentleman was now pretty fully engaged. He had no free hours left for strolls in Regent's Park, even if he had been at all inclined to go in that direction. He found himself more and more closely occupied by day and night. Victor Heron was successful in a double sense; he was a political and a social success. He had spoken in the House of Commons, and he had, by universal acknowledgment, made a hit. There is hardly any other success so delightful, so rich in immediate effect, left in our modern English life. His manner was fresh, easy, and animated, with now and then a stronger dash of something that went as near to eloquence as our House of Commons will endure in these days. He knew his subject—a question of foreign policy—thoroughly, and he was never dry or heavy. Then he became a social success as well, and at once. He was invited everywhere. He was envied for many things: for his political chances, for his prospects as one who would probably be able to "entertain his party," and for the prospective possession of the very pretty girl who was seen so often with him, who was known to carry with her a large fortune, and whom he was, everybody said, about to marry.

Heron never knew what an important person he had become until he saw the difference which his altered position made in the number and kind of the letters which he found on his table every morning. They lay there in piles; letters on all manner of political, social, industrial, educational questions; letters from inventors, from theorists, from men—oh, how many of these there were!—from men with grievances; not a few from women with grievances. He soon found that even to look into half the questions of this kind which he was besought to investigate for himself would take up his whole time every day and night, making no allowance for food or sleep. At first, remembering his own grievance, he used to make a desperate effort to grapple with this huge bulk of complaint. Then he called in the aid of a secretary, and tried in this way to accomplish the task, and to be member for the aggrieved generally. But even this had to be given up. A staff of secretaries would have been necessary to get through the mere reading and answering of letters in cases with which, when he had mastered their details, he usually found that he could do absolutely nothing. This was in itself a disappointment and a pain to our young Quixote. He found that the task of redressing all or half the supposed human wrong that thrust itself querulously upon his notice would have been beyond his power, even though his summers to such length of years should come as those of the many-wintered crow himself.

He was approaching, and with every prospect of success, the great business which had brought him back to England. He had given notice of a motion to call the attention of the House of Commons to the whole subject, connected with his administration of the St. Xavier's Settlements and to move a resolution on it; and he had obtained a day for the debate, and a very animated and interesting discussion was expected. It had been hinted to him that if he merely wanted another appointment, and a much better one, the Government would be only too delighted to avail themselves of his services, and it was gently suggested that there never was any intention to visit his former administration with any censure whatever. But Victor remained, it is needless to say, absolutely deaf to all such suggestions as this. He desired to vindicate a principle, he said, and not to satisfy any personal interest. It is needless, perhaps, also to say that the suggestion was made to him in the most cautious and unofficial way. It was made by a mediator, who, if Heron had shown any disposition to accept it, would soon have put him in the way of receiving an official offer, but who the moment it was declined was able to speak of it as a personal suggestion or conjecture, only offered in the beaten way of friendship, and binding nobody to anything.

All this made a change in the position of Mr. Heron since the time, not so long ago, when he came to London almost unknown, and for a while haunted vainly the ante-chambers of great officials, and could not even get to speech of them. Victor was modest enough, and often thought with a kind of wonder and humiliation of the chance he once so nearly ran of sinking down to be the mere possessor of a grievance, or one possessed by it, going round the world of London pestering people with the tale of a wrong in which they felt no manner of interest. He could not but feel proud and happy at some moments when he thought of the change a short time had brought about for him. He was well aware that he owed three-fourths of his success to the advice and the energy of Mr. Money. If he had not stepped out on the balcony of the Louvre Hotel in Paris that memorable night, he might never have met Mr. Money, and things might have been so different. In all his pride and his gratitude, were there ever moments when he was inclined to wish that he had not stepped out on that balcony, and that things had been different?

Was our young Quixote ungrateful or hard to satisfy? was he morbidly discontented, or mean, or intolerably fickle, or absurdly self-conceited? No; he was not any of these things. Yet it is certain that he was not happy. He had won success; he seemed likely to win much more, and he was already looking back many a time, and with genuine bitterness of regret, to the bright days when he appeared to be all a failure. Except in moments of excitement, Victor Heron was unhappy. He made his moments of excitement as many as he could, and he dreaded when they were over. He dreaded to be alone; and even that was not the worst, for there was society which gave him more pain than any solitude. When he came home of nights he sometimes sat in his chair and leaned his chin on his hand, and remained there for an hour thinking. Anyone who had seen him at such times would have wisely said that the late hours of the House of Commons were telling heavily on him already, he looked so haggard.

He was indeed in a miserable dilemma, if that could by any possibility be called a dilemma which seemed to have no alternative, or second way to it or out of it. He had made a fearful mistake and found it out too late. In an impulse of gratitude, regard, surprise, generous humiliation, he had believed himself in love with Lucy Money—when he saw beyond mistake that she was in love with him. For an instant that light seemed to surround her in which a man sees the chosen one—the only one, the loved. The moment he saw that the sweet, good girl was in love with him, it seemed as if Heaven, and gratitude, and fate ordered him to marry her, and for the hour it was easy for him to believe that he loved her. Nor did the glamour pass away all at once. For some time yet he continued to believe that he had all he desired in life; that he loved and was happy, and had indeed found measureless content. There may have been even then a sense of unsatisfied craving in his heart, as of something missing which he had once hoped to find and possess. But he shut all such vague emotions down, and pressed the lid of what he told himself were his real convictions strongly down upon them. He told himself that he was happy. It has come far on the way towards unhappiness when a young man has to tell himself that he is happy in the woman he is to marry. Victor Heron caught himself arguing the question sometimes, and started and turned his thoughts another way, as some good person might have done in older days if he found a diabolical temptation inducing him to blaspheme a saint or question his own faith.

The horizon only began to grow darker as his knowledge of himself and his state of mind grew clearer. Then there followed an interval during which he felt like one conscience-stricken. It seemed to him that, in admitting to himself what he felt, he was doing a wrong to poor Lucy which no kindness and no devotion on his part could atone for. Now came fits of devoted attention to her, when the poor little maid thought that never had there been lover like hers, and her soul floated softly in a golden haze of affection and gratitude. Then came what we may call the common-sense and worldly mood, when Victor Heron strove to get himself to regard his engagement as an ordinary young man of sense would doubtless have regarded it. He told himself that, after all, he ought to be one of the happiest of men; that he was going to have a charming young wife, as sweet a woman as any in the world. He remembered how Coleridge had said that a Desdemona is the wife that in his heart every man would like to have. He argued with himself about the impossibility of having everything exactly as one would appoint it for himself; and he sometimes marvelled how so sweet a girl as Lucy ever could have cared about him. On the whole he reasoned with himself as a sensitive and unworldly young man like him might be supposed to do, who has in a moment of impulse committed himself to a responsibility which he cannot any longer even wish to avoid. In truth, it was his grievance and not himself that was to blame. His grievance had so possessed and absorbed him that he had not had time or thought for anything else. He had never asked of his heart what it would have until the hour for such a question had gone by. There was left to him one general frank resolve, to do his duty and make the very best of everything, and make, above all, those happy whose happiness in any way depended on him. After all, perhaps, marriage is not very often undertaken in much better spirit. A man's life, he had always heard from wise people, lies for the most part outside home and love.

But the member for Keeton kept clear of Minola Grey. He did so rather in obedience to an undefined instinct than to any deliberate resolve. He had not searched into his own feelings—rather, indeed, he had resolutely kept from all such search. But he avoided Minola Grey. Their sudden and sincere friendship had suddenly come to an end somehow. He thought that for some reason she had lately been displeased with him, and on the whole he was not sorry. It was better so. He heard of her a great deal from Lucy and from others, but he saw her very seldom.

One afternoon, early, Minola set out to pay a visit to Lucy Money. Lucy had written her a reproachful letter because she had not come more often lately, and insisting that she must see "dear, darling Nola *at once, at once*," because of something most particular on which she wanted her advice "so much, oh, so much!" Minola had not great faith, perhaps, in the importance of the matter in hand, but she went promptly to see her friend. When she got to the house in Victoria Street she was shown at once into the drawing-room, and sat down, expecting every moment to hear the light step of Lucelet. But Lucelet had gone out for a short time, and had only left instructions that if Miss Grey came she was to be shown into the drawing room without a word, lest she might go away if she were told in the first instance that she, Lucy, was not at home. While Minola was waiting, the member for Keeton called; and the member for Keeton now was hardly supposed to ask any question, but to go and come in the house as though it were his own. If Lucy was not at home, some other member of the family was likely to be, and, if anyone was there, it was assumed that Mr. Heron would come in and talk and wait.

Minola sat down to the piano to beguile the time, and began to sing and play to herself in her soft, pure, low tones. She sang the song of the lover's farewell to Northmaven, and to the maid who was to look over the wild waves in vain for the skiff of him who came not again—the song from "The Pirate," which she had herself adapted to the music of an old ballad. When Victor approached the drawing-room, and heard the sound of the piano, he thought at first that Lucy was the performer, and he paused a moment to listen, without interrupting her. But as the voice reached his ears, he knew its tones and he knew the song, and remembered when he had heard it last—when he had heard it first. The blood rushed into his face, and he literally started back. His sensitive lips trembled; his hands caught at his moustache in his old way when something excited or embarrassed him; and a sound almost like a groan involuntarily broke from him. Oh, how unhappy, how wretched he felt that moment! and how like some one guilty of a crime or a deceit, merely because of the pain that he could not conceal from himself any more! At first he drew back and was about to go away. But he recovered himself, and asked of himself what possible excuse he could give to Lucy when she heard that he had actually been in the house, as she must hear from the servants, and that he had gone away without seeing her. He assumed that Lucy was in the drawing-room with Minola, and at that very moment they might come out and see him retreating as if he were a detected robber. He felt ashamed now of the sudden, absurd instinct of flight, and the ignoble, guilty suggestions it brought with it. "In Heaven's name," he thought, "why should I back out? Why should I not see Miss Grey or anybody else? Am I a fool or a boy?" He went on and crossed the threshold; and then for the first time he saw that Miss Grey was alone. It was too late to retreat, even though she was alone, for she had heard his footsteps, and stopped her song and rose from the piano, and waited to receive him.

"Oh—Miss Grey—I hope you are well!" was the remarkable observation with which Victor began.

"Quite well, thank you," was the appropriate reply.

There was much embarrassment on both sides. Naturally the man was the more embarrassed of the two. On him fell in all duty the responsibility of conducting the conversation. Yet, having got thus far, he did not seem inclined to try any farther.

"I thought I should find Lucy in," Minola said, since it seemed clear that she must say something, or let silence settle down upon them.

"I thought she would be here too," he said. "I suppose she has gone out."

This was so obvious an inference that it hardly called for addition or supplement of any kind. Minola said, "I suppose so," and that attempt appeared likely to come to an end.

"I hope you like the House of Commons," Minola began again.

"Oh, yes, certainly; very much; that is, I like it very well indeed. Have you never gone to hear a debate?"

"No, never."

"You must go. Oh, yes, you ought to go! You could go some night with Miss Money."

"With Lucy?"

"Yes, with Lucy I mean, of course."

He spoke in a sort of irritated way, very unlike the old manner of the chivalrous man with a grievance.

"I should like to go very much," Minola said; "I should like to hear you speak."

"Oh, I shan't speak often; I shan't speak, perhaps, more than once again; I don't care to be one of the talkers; I haven't the gift to make much of that sort of thing."

"I heard that you were a great success."

"Who told you so?" He put the question with some of his old directness, but not with the kind of boyish friendliness that used to make his simple straightforwardness seem sweet and genial. Now his tone sounded almost harsh. Minola began to think that his manners were not improving in his parliamentary career. Is it possible, she thought, that success is already spoiling him?

"Several persons told me," she answered quietly; "and I read it in the papers. I am fond of reading the papers."

"Several persons told you so? Who were they?"

"Well, let me see——" Minola became all the more composed and mistress of herself in proportion as his manner seemed to grow more brusque and odd. "Mr. Money told me, for one; and of course Lucy told me; but she is prejudiced, and counts for nothing; and Mr. Sheppard told me."

"Do you see him often—Sheppard?"

"Not very often."

"When is he trying for Parliament again?"

"I don't know."

"But you wish him success, surely?"

"I shall wish him success if it does him any good, or makes him at all happy—or improves him in any way," Miss Misanthrope said demurely.

"You think it does not always improve people to be in the House of Commons?" Victor said, with a somewhat forced smile.

"Not always, perhaps; but I have had so little opportunity of judging."

There was a moment of silence.

"I don't think I can wait any longer," Victor said. "Are you waiting to see Lucy, Miss Grey?"

If Minola had spoken out the plain truth, she would have said that if he was going to wait she was not, and that if he was going away she would stay. Perhaps, if he had spoken out the plain truth, he for his part would have said much the same thing. As he was evidently going, she said—

"Yes, I shall stay until she comes in; I shall take up a book and read; she will not be very long away, I should think."

"Will you be kind enough to tell her that I was here, and waited for her some time?"

"Certainly; with pleasure."

He seemed to be going, and yet he did not go; in truth, he was only thinking whether he ought to shake hands with her in ordinary friendly fashion, or whether he had better make a bow, and so take himself off. Not a matter of great moment, it might appear, and yet it was enough to torment Heron just then. If he seemed cold and distant and unfriendly, would not Miss Grey wonder at his manner, and perhaps think him rude and uncivil; or think him changed, and begin to conjecture what the reason of the change might be? If he showed himself friendly in the old way, would she become also friendly in the old way? and would not that perhaps be rather more of an ordeal than he could safely bear? But as he glanced towards her he thought he saw a look of surprise on her face, and this settled the matter. He could not allow her to think him cold or rude; and why should he not try to show himself as a friend?

Minola was seated, and had already taken up a book. He went up to her and held out his hand. Then he noticed for the first time how pale she was looking.

"Good-morning, Miss Grey," he said; "I am sorry I have to go so soon; it seems so long since we exchanged a word."

With this happily-chosen speech he came to a pause.

A faint colour came over the paleness of her face.

"You have become a public man now," she said, with desperate ease, "and your time is occupied. But we shall meet sometimes, I hope. I shall be always delighted."

There are incidents of martyrdom, perhaps, with which it is less difficult for the sufferer to deal than it was for Minola to assume the expression of smiling friendly ease that accompanied these words. Even as she spoke them she was thinking of how often she had warmly disputed the truth of Thackeray's constant assertion, that women are all skilled by nature in hypocrisy. She felt that she was then playing the hypocrite with a skill which she would once have believed it impossible for her to attain, and with a skill, too, which once she would have despised herself for possessing.

"Do you still walk in Regent's Park sometimes?" Victor asked.

"Yes, very often."

"I have not been there this long time."

"Oh, no; you have no time for that sort of thing now, I am glad to think. That is for idlers."

Meanwhile the ceremony of shaking hands had been duly executed. Victor was going, when his eyes fell on the book she had in her hand. He stopped again.

"That is Blanchet's volume of poems, isn't it?" he asked.

"Is it? Oh, yes, of course it is! I had only just taken it up, and I hadn't noticed." She coloured a little, a very little. She was somewhat embarrassed by his discovery of the fact that she had not known what book she held in her hand.

"Do you know, Miss Grey, that I always feel some remorse of conscience about that book? It was a shame that you should have been allowed to pay all that money; you ought to have allowed some one to share the cost with you at least."

"But I explained to you at the time all about that; I could not allow my Mary Blanchet to be indebted to anyone but me for any kindness. There was some selfishness in that, I know; but I could not help the feeling. And in any case I am sure Mary would have been wretched at the idea of anyone doing it but me. So it was not all selfishness on my part."

"The idea of your doing anything selfish! I don't believe you ever thought of yourself in all your life. Well, you were very generous to poor Blanchet; I hope at least he will not prove himself ungrateful."

"Oh, I don't want him to be grateful! I dare say he would be as grateful as anyone else—any other man, I mean, of course—if I wanted him to be."

Victor smiled the most natural and genuine smile he had yet shown during their conversation.

"Now you want to become the Miss Misanthrope again," he said "But it doesn't deceive us who know you, Miss Grey. It was I who called you Miss Misanthrope, wasn't it—who suggested the name, I mean?"

"Yes, I believe it was; I am very well content with the name, and I think myself fairly entitled to bear it."

"Not you," he said. "I knew it didn't apply then, and I know it far better now."

"But to be a Miss Misanthrope isn't to be a criminal."

"No; but you couldn't be a misanthrope, unless in some time when there was no possibility left of trying to prove that you loved the human race."

"Which, however, I can assure you, I do not."

"All the same, you try to help people. Well, good-morning."

"Here is Lucy," said Minola, looking up; "I am so glad you did not go at once."

Lucy ran into the room dressed as she had just come in from the carriage. She rushed at Minola and embraced her.

"So you were not going to wait for me?" she said breathless, and pointing to the hat which Victor held in his hand. "Yes, I know you were impatient, like all men, and you were for darting away, only dear Nola kept you and would not let you go! Now that was so kind of you, Nola."

"But, dear, I can't take the compliment or the thanks; it was no doing of mine; Mr. Heron was just going, only that you came in time and stopped him."

"I did not know when you were coming back, or whether you were coming at all," Victor said, "or I shouldn't have thought of going away; but I really have lots of things to do."

"Well, I am glad to hear that you were growing impatient," Lucy said with a smile, "for it looks as if you missed me, Victor; and I like you to miss me when I am away. It was Theresa who would have me to go out with her; and she said that there was some committee or something, and that you could not be here to-day, Victor—somebody told her."

Lucy looked very pretty. There was a light of surprise and gratification on her face because of the unexpected coming of Victor, which almost supplied the place of the expression that high intelligence can lend. Minola looked at her with sincere admiration, and could not wonder that she had found a lover even in a man who might be supposed to seek naturally for a level of intellectual companionship higher than hers. But Victor was for the moment silent, nor did he and Minola speak to each other again until Victor rose to go, saying he had only looked in to see Lucy for a moment, and that he had an appointment.

"You are coming to dinner?" Lucy asked, with a colour of anxiety and hope on her pretty face.

He shook his head.

"I am afraid not," he said; "I fancy your father and I must put up with a hasty dinner got anyhow this evening, Lucy."

He was bowing to Miss Grey, and about to go, when Lucy said—

"Have you two been quarrelling, might I ask? Victor, do you generally take leave of Nola in that cool sort of way? Why, you used to be such friends."

"I am sure I hope we are 'such friends' still," Minola began with a strenuous effort to be at ease.

"As good friends as ever," Victor rather awkwardly added.

"Then, why don't you shake hands?" inquired the pertinacious little Lucy. "Give me thy hand, terrestrial—so," she said, seizing one of Victor's hands in hers, and continuing one of the Shakespearian quotations which she had caught up from Minola, and was rather proud to display. "Give me thy hand, celestial—yes, Nola darling, you deserve to be called celestial, I think—give me thy hand, celestial—so;" and with pretty and gracious compulsion she drew Minola and Victor together, and placed Minola's hand in his and made them clasp.

The friendly clasp was over in a moment. But in that short moment the eyes of Minola and of Victor met unavoidably, suddenly, for the first time that day, and then were as suddenly withdrawn; and each knew for the first time, and now to the full, what a misfortune had fallen on them all; and Lucy looked from one face to the other, and felt her heart stand still.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A LOUNGE IN THE PARK.

It is true that this man and woman knew by one single meeting of the eyes that secret which he had never known before, and which she had never dreamed of. But each, as we have seen, was fatally prepared for the discovery. Each had for some time—one of the two for a long time—been brooding over the thought which represented one-half of the secret. Each heart was prepared to receive the impression of the other. The two natures were ready to affect each other as two substances are—as flint and steel are, as the burning-glass and the darkened paper. If anyone could have asked Minola Grey whether she thought Victor Heron loved her, she would have answered, if she thought such a question worth answering at all, that he did not; that he never had cared about her except perhaps as a friend. If Victor were asked whether he thought Minola cared about him, he would have answered, in all good faith, that he believed of late she rather disliked him than otherwise. Yet it is certain that each learned the secret of the other in the same moment as each glance betrayed its own secret. Come what would, from that moment these two were isolated from all others by their common knowledge of the truth.

That was a trying hour for Minola which she spent in Victoria Street after Heron had gone. It was not perhaps less trying for Lucy; but Minola did not then know that. Fortunately for both of them, Lucy and her mother had an engagement that evening which made it impossible for Mrs. Money to press Minola to stay long with them. It was lucky, too, that visitors came in, and that while Minola was there she and Lucy were not left alone. If

Minola had been less distracted than she was, she must have seen how very different Lucy's manner was from that which was usual to her; and how she was in alternation of wild, flighty spirits, and strange, shy, shrinking despondency. But in truth Minola's soul was all engrossed in the terror of the discovery she had made, and the necessity of hiding it, of burying it, at all risks. She was so little used to concealment or suspicion of any kind that it never occurred to her to think that perhaps Lucy might have seen what she had seen. Had the two girls been left alone for a moment, some revelation, some explanation, must perhaps have come. But contrary to her usual way, Lucy did not try to get her friend into a separate corner or a separate room with her, and Minola was only filled by the one desire to get decently away, out of the house, and into the open air. She felt like some one shamed and guilty, like some treacherous, deceitful friend who had no right to stand beneath that roof any more. There were moments when the whole horizon of her hope seemed bounded by the moment when she could once more be in the open street, and free of the house which had always given her so kind a welcome.

Victor Heron walked slowly along Victoria Street. The day was warm and sunny; the spring was growing rapidly towards summer. Even the sombre lines of Victoria Street were cheered and gladdened by the bright and youthful beauty of the season and of the day. The sense and sight of all this spring loveliness, tantalising often even to happy dwellers in the town, because it told them of the delights of the country they could not reach just then, sent a new pang into the heart of the distracted Heron. He had some appointments to keep, some persons to see, but he was unable to think of anything then but himself and his misfortune. He sauntered slowly with dragging steps, almost like an invalid, into St. James's Park, and sat down there and looked on the ground, and appeared for the time to be engrossed in drawing lines on the dust of the walk beneath him with the point of his cane.

He knew it all now. For some time back he had known only too well the state of his own feelings. He had known it although he shrank, as far as he could, from any search into his heart to find what stirred it so, holding it a sort of treason to his engagement and to the girl who loved him to ask any question of himself which must be a secret from her. But despite of this it had become known to him only too well that he had made a terrible mistake so far as his own fate was concerned. Yet what was that compared with what he now knew? This morning his course was clear. He had nothing greatly to repent of. He believed that he could not possibly have had the woman he loved and would have chosen; it was not much of a sacrifice to marry the sweet girl who loved him, certainly not wisely, but far too well. But now he had the misery of knowing that it was only his own fatal and stupid blindness that had stood in the first instance between the girl he loved and him. She too was to be a sacrifice. There were three unhappy creatures linked together in a cruel bond of misfortune, which might never have been forged for them but for his astounding folly and darkness. There was no way out of it now but with misery to all. He was so tortured by the thought of the unhappiness he had brought on others that he had hardly yet a sense of mere regret for the happiness that might have been his. It was but after some period of distracted emotion that he began to be able to think of this.

Sudden and wholly unexpected as the discovery of the morning had been, there was no shadow of a doubt left on his mind as to its genuineness. It was an instant—a flash of bewildered, pathetic light in a girl's eye that drooped and turned away in the very glance, and he was as certain that Minola Grey and he stood isolated from all the world by a reciprocal and hopeless love as he was that the sun was now shining on his pain. He had little experience in love-making, but he knew this. All now seemed clear to him. Every strange word, or mood, or look of Minola which had puzzled him in other days was made clear to him now. Words and looks that he positively had forgotten came back, living and burning, on his memory. All was now made consistent, like a well-written tale, like a harmony. Yes; he might have been happy. She would have loved him. She was the only being on earth in whose company he had always felt that he could be quite himself, and all that was best in him seemed to grow without effort. She would have loved him. He would have had in her a companion to share every mood, and feeling, and hope. To her intellect he could have looked up as well as to her heart. Good heavens! how did he fail to know all that before? When he found that involuntarily there was growing up in him a love for every place in which he knew that she walked; when the sound of her footfall brought a joy with it; when the voice of her singing made his heart thrill—how could he have failed even for a moment to know that it all meant, not friendship, but love?

She knows it all now, he kept thinking. He knew by the expression in her eyes that he had betrayed his secret as she had betrayed hers. Her life, too, was spoiled. And poor Lucy—the affectionate, innocent girl whose unsuspecting little freak of playful, childish confidence had of itself brought about all this discovery—was there to be no feeling, no pity for her? The very thought of the simplicity with which Lucy had brought their hands together was a new pain. She seemed so innocent, and he seemed so treacherous. In his misery he grievously exaggerated his own fault, and thought of his impulsive error as if it were a treason and a crime.

What fatality sent him into that place to remain there so long? Why did he not shake off all the brooding that was so futile, at least until his hours of work were over, and he was free to brood and be miserable alone? What has a busy man, for whom all sorts of persons and affairs are waiting, to do with sentimental regrets and the lamentations of a ruined lover—at least, what has he to do with them in the daytime? He was sitting there in a broad walk, near the little lake; and the seat he sat on was just near a turn of the walk, so that any promenader might come on him unthinking, and recognise him before he had time either to rise and go away or to compose himself into attitude and demeanour less likely to attract attention. Poor Victor thought nothing of all this. He had forgotten for the time all business, and appointments, and constituents, and only knew what had happened that morning, and that he was very unhappy and had made others so. But, if he committed a breach of duty as a public man in thus idling away his time, his error did not go unpunished, for a step came near him, and he looked up, and he saw Minola Grey. He had just been saying to himself again and again, as one who is stamping a resolve down into his mind—"Come what will, let anyone suspect what he likes, I must not see her any more." He was thinking with a certain grim satisfaction of the probability of his soon getting some colonial appointment, and of the quickness with which he would leave England; and when he could not help asking himself how poor little Lucy would like such exile from her family and her friends, he answered firmly that anything would be better than the chance of seeing Minola Grey. And now he looked up and Minola Grey was there before him, and saw him.

He had stayed too long in that place. For Minola, leaving Lucy with a heart bursting to be relieved from the restraint that was on it, had remembered just as she was in the street that if she went any way in the direction of the House of Commons she might very possibly meet Victor Heron, or at least Mr. Money. So she turned away, and made up her mind to go through the Park and out into Waterloo Place, and home to the West Centre by that way.

She was close upon Victor before she saw him, and they saw each other at the same moment. So much change had been made for both of them by that one glance from each in the morning, that it did not seem possible to Minola to make any attempt at mere acquaintanceship and casual conversation any more. She had no time to think; she did not well know what she was doing; but she was passing Heron without a single word, or more than a scared and startled look.

An instant before, Victor had made up his mind that, come what would, he must not meet her any more. Yet, by a strange inconsistency, he was made angry by her attempt to pass him without a word. He resented it as though it were a casting of deliberate scorn on him. For the moment he almost looked on Minola as one might look on an accomplice who turns away from his friend in some hour of trial.

He leaped from his seat and went towards her, and prevented her from going any farther.

"Are you not going to speak to me?" he asked.

She stopped and looked down, and tried to seem composed. A woman seldom so loses her sense of the proprieties of things as not to keep in mind the fact that there are people likely to pass by and take account of unusual demeanour. Minola saw, too, that Victor Heron was not in a mood to remember that or anything else just then, and that for his sake and hers she must give some way to his humour. She was trying to compose herself to this, when he repeated his question.

"What shall I say, Mr. Heron?" she asked gently, and in a tone of subdued remonstrance. "I don't see any use in anything I can say; it is all so very unhappy."

It was strange how they both assumed the reality of the discovery that each had made. It was curious how each assumed that in the other's mind was a clear understanding of the meaning of every word. There was no supposed need of explanation. Between two natures alike so candid there was not the faintest attempt at any fencing off the reality.

Victor turned the way she was going and walked by her side. She had no power to prevent him, and was only somewhat relieved to find that they were going on.

There was silence for a moment or two; then Victor spoke.

"We are very unfortunate," he said; and there seemed to Minola something almost terrible in the simple acknowledgment of companionship involved in the little monosyllable "we."

"We are, indeed," she said, accepting the companionship as an acknowledged reality.

"It was all my fault," he said; "I was a fool—a blind and foolish idiot. I only wish that I alone had to suffer for it. I do, indeed."

"I am sure you do," Minola said. She knew him too well to doubt that it must be an added pain to him, things being as they were, that she should feel for him as he felt for her.

"You blame me for all this, Miss Grey?"

"Oh, no! I don't blame anyone; yes, I blame myself, but only for allowing anyone to know—it would not have been so bad, only for that." She stopped; she feared she had said too much.

"How long have you known of this?" Victor asked. He walked slowly by her side, and looked, not at her, but down at the dusty path. It was curious how both spoke without any distinct reference to the matter of which they talked. All that was assumed between them. Between them now, as between the brother and sister in Goethe's tragedy, was to be only the truth. That was the necessity of their condition.

"This long time; I don't know how long, but very long," she answered. There was something peculiarly pathetic in the simple humility of her answer.

A groan came from Victor. A long time—and he had never known anything or thought of anything until lately, but rushed headlong on like a blind fool.

"Then all might have been well if I hadn't been a fool and a madman!" He struck the point of his walking-cane fiercely at the ground, as if he were stabbing at some enemy—himself, perhaps.

Minola plucked up heart to say something, which she thought she ought to say.

"I don't know, Mr. Heron; I am afraid it would not have been much better—somebody would have had to suffer. There is—there is Lucy, you know; we must not forget her."

"Yes, yes," he said, "we must not forget her; it is not any fault of hers."

"Oh, no!"

"But when you knew this," he said, suddenly looking into Minola's face for the first time during this curious promenade, "why did you go on as if you never could like anyone in the world? How was I to know? Good God! it never occurred to me to think that a woman like you could care for a man like me—in that sort of way. Do you remember when I told you one day, long ago, that I had a goddess theory about women? Do you remember my saying anything like that to you one day?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Heron, quite well!"

"That was true enough," he said, with a sort of smile. "I did think of women like that. I thought of you as if you were a goddess, Miss Grey; and I did not believe it possible that such a woman as you could care about me. I was quite grateful when I found that poor little Lucy was foolish enough to think about me; I was, indeed. But why did you play at being a hater of men and all that? Why did you deceive me? You should not have stooped to any such follies. I knew you didn't really hate men or hate anybody; I knew you were a great deal too good for that; but I did believe you were not a girl to care about any of us, in that way."

"I am sorry for any affectation of any kind; I don't suppose any good ever came of it; but I did believe that my feelings were like that, at one time."

"But when you found that they weren't, then why did you keep up such a pretence any more?" He remonstrated in the earnest way of one who believes that he has been heavily wronged.

"I will tell you—I will tell you all the truth. I suppose we ought not to speak in this way at all; I suppose it is like a treason to Lucy, and to all our friends; I feel now almost like a traitor. But this is only for once, Mr. Heron, and to settle all; and perhaps we shall both be better, and see our way the clearer for having said this—although I came into this place only because I was afraid that if I went the other way I might meet you—and see how things happen!"

She felt ashamed to go on; it was as if they were culprits. He, too, felt humbled to think that she should have had to try to avoid him.

"Well," he said, "you may as well speak out now the whole truth, and let us know once for all; I wish we had been a little more outspoken before this, both of us."

For the moment, in his pain, he seemed to forget that only he could have spoken out, and that he had not known truly what he would have until it was too late.

"No, it would have been of no use," Minola said simply; "at least, somebody would have had to suffer. The truth is this, Mr. Heron: Lucy told me long ago all that she felt, poor child. She trusted all her secret to me; what could I do after that, but try at least to keep my own? You do not suppose I was to go round the world—our little world, I mean—as the girl who was in love, and whom nobody cared about?" There was a natural touch of the "Miss Misanthrope" in Minola as she spoke these words.

"Then this was why you seemed to dislike people—because of that?"

"I didn't see anything else to do."

They walked on a few steps in silence.

"It's all hopeless now," Victor said.

"Hopeless as far as that goes, but not hopeless otherwise for you, Mr. Heron. You will be very happy some time."

He turned upon her almost angrily.

"Do you call that happy," he asked, "to be married to a woman I don't love, and to know that I might have married the woman I do love, and to know that it is all my own fault, and that I have done as much wrong and brought as much unhappiness to one as to the other? Do you think that is a prospect for a man to look out to, and be happy? I wish to Heaven I had been killed in any of these trumpery affairs out there!" He tossed his head impatiently and contemptuously, as indicating the St. Xavier's Settlements, and the slight esteem in which he held his colonial career now. "I wish to God I had been killed there and forgotten before I ever saw her face or yours!"

The intensity of his tone when he spoke the word "forgotten" might have served as an indication of his character, for one of the passionate dreams of his youth and his manhood had been that his name should be remembered somehow, as that of a man who had done good work in the service of England. It may be that if he had had less of that sort of manly ambition he might have better understood how to see his way in the more familiar trials of character. That ambition had supplied for him the place of the dreams of love, and of loving women, and of romance, and all the rest of it; and when the new feelings—new to him—came at last, he did not understand them as a commonplace young man would have been sure to do.

Minola listened to him quietly, and let him speak all he cared to say just then. She answered after a while:

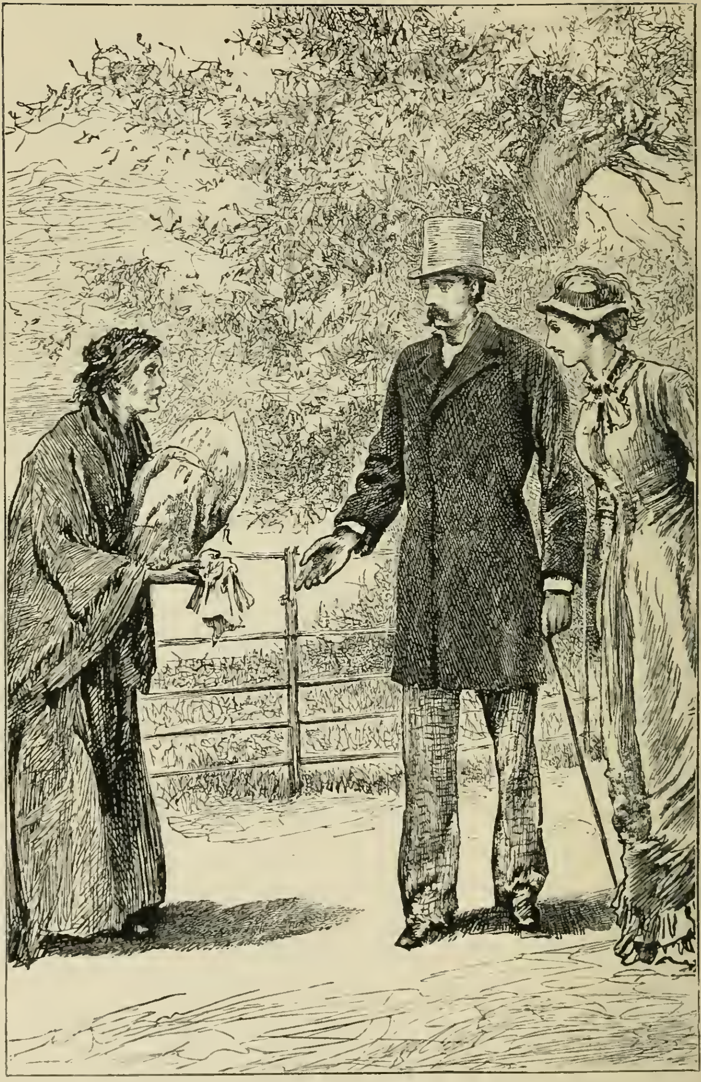
"Oh, no, Mr. Heron, I don't mean that; I don't mean that you could help feeling this for a while. But you will grow reconciled after a little time; and you know how Lucy deserves to be loved—anyone must love her, I think; and then you will have a career and success; and the lives of men are so full and so active, and you have so many things to think of; while we——"

She stopped. She did not care to utter the immemorial lament, the ever true, ever pathetic, pitiful lament, over the narrowness of woman's life, that was wailing in her heart at that moment—on that bright spring day in pleasant St. James's Park.

But the words touched Victor profoundly. He turned away from thoughts of self to her.

"It's true," he said; "I suppose we have the best of it always; I was thinking of the shame that all this is to me. You don't feel that; you have done wrong to no one."

"I don't know," Minola answered sadly; "I think I am



"*It's the handkerchief, sir, the lady dropped.*"

doing wrong in speaking of all this to you; I think I must have done some wrong when that can come to be possible, and when it seems the best thing left to do. I am Lucy's friend; she trusted all her secret to me—and now——"

"There is nothing to be done," Heron said moodily. As if it were possible to think of anything that could be done!

"Nothing, except to make the best of what is; and for you to make her happy, and to be a success; and to go back to the House of Commons now;" she tried to speak in a firm and cheery tone.

"I can't even ask you to remember me——"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Heron! why not? If you think it likely that I should forget how kind you were and what a friend, then ask me to remember you by all means. I shall remember you whether you ask me or not."

"And you," he asked, looking round at her, "do you ask me to remember you?"

"No; you will remember me, I know—why should you not? We shall have to meet again sometimes, I suppose, and why should we not be friends?"

He understood her this time. She was making a determined effort to replace their relation to each other on the basis of friendship. She had said all she meant to say about other feelings, and how they came to be felt in vain. He respected her decision, as indeed he now respected all she said or did. Up to that time they had both spoken with a certain shamefacedness and contrition, as if both alike were conscious of degradation in their strange and chance confidence. From the time when she spoke these words they both became calmer, and looked around with less sense of humiliation.

A hurrying step was heard behind them. Victor stopped and turned round. "How is it with me when every noise appals me?" How is it with us when we start at a hurried step on the path behind us? This was a very harmless intruder. It was a poor woman who had picked up something, with which she was hastening after Minola. As Victor stopped and she came up with him first, she spoke to him in good-natured breathlessness—

"It's the handkerchief, sir, the lady dropped—your good lady; I saw it on the walk, and I said to my husband, It belongs to the gentleman or his wife." She handed the kerchief to Victor, delighted to have been of any service to anyone.

Minola heard the well-meant words as well as Victor. She could not keep the colour from her cheeks; but she took the kerchief and was able to thank the poor woman in coherent words, and even with a bright smile.

They only walked a few yards on together. At the first turning to which they came Minola stopped.

"Good-bye, Mr. Heron; I am going this way." She did not give her hand.

"Good-bye," he said; and then came towards her and held out his hand. She put hers in his; there was a formal farewell—no pressure which either might feel; they did not allow their eyes to meet this time. Then he went his way and she went hers, neither at the moment knowing or thinking whither the ways led; and that was all, and all was over.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### "LEAN'D HER BREAST UP TILL A THORN."

MR. MONEY and Victor Heron walked home that night together from the House of Commons. It was more than half an hour after midnight when they left the House, but both considered themselves getting off rather well so early as that, and neither loved going to bed at prudent and wholesome hours. Victor walked with Money to the door of the Victoria Street house, and then Money asked him to come in that they might talk a little. "There are two or three things I want to talk about," he said, "and we are sure to have a quiet hour now." Victor was willing, and Money brought him up to his study, where a fire was looking very cheery, although the spring was a little advanced, and there were cigars and other preparations for making a quiet hour pass agreeably.

"I like this time of night," Money said, "because one is sure to be let alone. There can't be any people wanting to see one now; and there are no newspapers and no letters, and all the house is in bed. This is about the only time of the day when I really feel that I am my own master. Come, take a cigar; there's Apollinaris and anything you like."

Victor sat down and began to smoke, and they fell to talking for a while about things in the House, and the debate on Victor's great question, which was soon to come off.

"By the way," Money said suddenly, "and before I forget, I saw our friend, your rival, to-day—Sheppard, you know; and he had something to say to me that I want to ask your opinion about, although perhaps it ought to be a sort of secret as yet. What would you think of him as a husband for our friend, Miss Grey?"

Victor almost started. He looked up so suddenly that Money followed unconsciously the direction of his eyes, fancying perhaps he had seen some unexpected sight.

"Did you think you heard some one stirring?" Money asked.

"No, I didn't. Well, about Sheppard?"

"What would you think of him, I was saying, as a husband for Minola Grey?"

Heron blew several straight puffs of smoke from his cigar before he answered. When he did speak his answer was not encouraging. "Absurd," was the remark he made.

Money smiled.

"Well, I should have thought so too, perhaps; but I believe there is something to be said for the idea after all. This man Sheppard came to me in rather a frank and straightforward way to-day, and asked me straight out to give him the help of my influence in persuading Miss Grey. He did propose for her before. Did you know that?"

"No, I did not."

"Nor I, although I dare say my women-folk did. Oh, yes, he told me candidly that he had proposed for her not only once but twice, or more often perhaps!"

"Yes; and she—what did she say?" Victor seemed to have some difficulty about his cigar; apparently it required tremendous puffing to keep it alight.

"That's a bad cigar, I think, you have got hold of; an odd thing, too, in that box. Throw it away; have another."

"No, thanks; this is all right. Well, what did she say?"

"Well, of course, you know, we may easily infer what she said when, after his having pressed her in that sort of way, she is not Mrs. Sheppard yet."

"Oh!" A kind of groan broke from Victor at the bare idea of Minola being Mrs. Sheppard. "I can't imagine how any man can persecute a girl in that way," he went on indignantly. "I think he ought to be kicked; if I were the brother of a girl like that I would kick him, by Jove!"

"Yes, just so, and perhaps the girl would not thank her brother in the least for his kindly intervention. My dear fellow, have you never heard that in such things nineteen naysays make one grant? It's all very well for you good-looking fellows, with a sort of conquering, careless air about you, who find the girls only too glad when you ask them—it's all very well for you to talk about not persecuting girls. But a man like Sheppard must press his case a little or he will have no chance at all. He isn't by any means a bad looking fellow either, but he has not the way that takes women; he must be content to ask, perhaps, and ask again. I have a good deal of sympathy for fellows like Sheppard."

"Well, but what does he want? He has asked Miss Grey, and she refused him—I should think so; what does he want now?"

"To ask again and not to be refused, I suppose."

"But what can you do for him?"

"He thinks that if I were to see the thing as he does, and to speak to Miss Grey about it, and advise her to think it over as favourably as she could, it might perhaps have some influence on her. You see, it's all very well just now while she is young, but she must grow tired some time or other of the kind of lonely life she leads, and she will not make new friends, and we are all in a manner breaking up. Theresa will be married very soon, and then Lucelet of course; and when the girls are married, I think sometimes of leaving England, Victor, my boy."

This was said with an air of carelessness, but, at the same time, Mr. Money closely watched Heron's face to see how he took the announcement. Victor certainly did look surprised.

"What on earth do you think of doing that for?"

"Well, you know my interests in a money way are much more in other countries than in this. In Russia, for instance, I have found people in authority to appreciate the things I do in a way that the people here never did. As long as the girls remained unmarried, of course, I should never have thought of that; but now, thank God, they are both going to be married in the happiest way, and my wife does not care for this country any more than I do, and one could often see one's children—a journey is nothing in our days—and on the whole I don't think I am much longer for England if things go as I expect. But there's time enough to talk about that," and he seemed a little relieved for having got even so far. "The thing I wanted to speak to you about now is this business of our friend Sheppard. You don't like the idea?"

"The thing seems to me absurd and preposterous. He is a slow, formal, dull sort of Philistine, and to marry him to such a girl—good heavens! how could you think of it?"

Victor Heron jumped up in his usual excitable way, and began to walk up and down the room.

"Look here," he said, stopping suddenly, "how should you like the idea of your own daughter—either of your daughters—being married to a man she cared nothing about, and had refused again and again? Put it in that light."

"But, my good fellow, a girl like that must marry some one.

She can't help herself. She is handsome and clever, and she has some money, and fellows will get around her, and the more generous she is the more easily she will be imposed upon. That fellow Blanchet has been trying hard to get her to fall in love with him. I'd rather trust her happiness a thousand times to a man like Sheppard than to a fellow like that. And, do you know?—our friend St. Paul actually fell in love with her—downright in love—and wanted her to marry him, and offered as a proof of his sincerity that she should begin by handing over every sixpence she has to little Mary Blanchet."

Heron flung himself down in his seat again, to give due ear to this revelation.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"St. Paul himself came and told me; he said she was the only girl he ever could have cared about, and that he would have given her money enough to make ducks and drakes of in any benevolent projects she liked. Confess, Heron, that there must have been some thing tempting in that—at least, there would have been to most girls. St. Paul, after all, is the son of a duke and the brother of a duke, and a clever girl might have hoped to cure him of all his nonsense, and bring him to terms with his people again, and get him back into society, and get herself there along with him. I tell you what—my wife is a terrible Radical and all that, and yet I am not by any means certain that if such an offer had been made to one of our girls a year or so back she would not have been delighted at the chance. But our friend Minola would not hear of it."

This was trying news to Victor. He knew only too well, because only too late, why Minola refused every love offer that could be made.

"According to all established ideas," Money said, "the girl ought to have been in love with some one else; but that is not so, I suppose, in this case. It seems that she knew no one in Keeton but this poor Sheppard. He tells me that she told him she was in love with nobody but a man in a book—that was while she was in Keeton; and here in London she only knew just the two or three fellows we have now been talking about; and so far as I can see she has refused them everyone in turn. There's positively no one left but you, Victor, and I suppose you never proposed for her?" Mr. Money smiled good-humouredly.

"No," Victor replied; "I never proposed for her."

"The right man has not come along, I suppose; but the question is, will he ever come?"

"Suppose he never comes?" Victor said, with sudden energy and jumping from his seat again. "Suppose he never comes, what then? It would be a thousand times better for a girl like that to live alone—yes, and die alone—than to marry a man she did not love, and to have to drag through life with that sort of man or with any man she did not care for in the right way. She is too good for him; she is too good for anyone, for that matter; but to marry him would be a shame. Don't have anything to do with it, Money! Think of your own daughters. How would you like to have Lucy married to a man she did not care for?"

"That would not be the worst," Money said. "There might be much worse than that. It might be Lucelet's chance—thank God, it isn't—not to be able to love anyone in that sort of way, and yet she might marry some good fellow, and make him a good little wife, and be happy in the end. No; it isn't that I should dread for Lucelet so much. It would be her marrying a man who did not really and truly love her."

Money said all this in a thoughtful, almost dreamy sort of way, holding his cigar in his hand the while. He spoke as one might speak of a danger which exists no longer, but of which he can hardly think even yet without a certain drear impression; and he ended with a sigh of relief.

"She is saved from that, my boy, thanks to you," he said, and he stretched out his hand to Heron, who was near him at the moment, pacing up and down in his still unquelled excitement.

Heron felt his heart torn with pain and shame. He hardly knew how to take that outstretched hand. He seemed as if he were driven along to say, "It's not true; I don't deserve your confidence, and you and your daughter ought to hate me." What might have come of the impulse no one can know, for just at that moment the attention of Mr. Money was suddenly drawn away.

"I certainly heard some one stirring outside the door there," he said; "odd, that. I thought everyone was in bed long ago. Stop a moment, Heron; I will go and see."

He went to the door and opened it. Heron was hardly even listening to his words.

"Why, it's Lucelet!" Money exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here, you little creature, at this time of night? Look here, Victor, here's a little eaves-dropper."

He came into the room, bringing with him the palpitating and rather affrighted little Lucy. She blushed crimson red at being thus caught, and finding that Victor was with her father.

"Oh, no, papa—for shame to say such a thing! I was not eaves-dropping; I was only listening to be sure that you were alone. At first I thought you were; and then I heard you talking, and I did not know who was with you, and I listened just for one moment, in order to be sure."

"You did not think it was Victor who was with me, I daresay?"

"No; at least, I didn't think so at first."

Lucy still looked embarrassed and alarmed. It must be owned that Victor Heron did not seem quite at his ease. Money was considerably amazed, for he had never had a visitation of this kind before.

"Take a seat with us, Lucy," Victor said at last, "since you have paid us a visit." He handed her a chair. She looked at him timidly and only said, "Thank you, Victor," but did not sit down. Her father put his hands on her shoulders and scrutinised her with a manner of good-humoured authority.

"So you have not been in bed at all, Lucelet? But that isn't anything very new—for you to sit up too late. But what did you want, pray, in this part of the building at this hour? Think of the possible shock to our nerves, you foolish young person. Suppose we had fancied we saw a ghost and expired of fright?"

Lucy smiled a rather wan smile.

"I wanted to speak to you, papa, and I thought I would sit up until you came in—it wouldn't be very late, perhaps; and then I heard you come, and I was not quite certain if you were alone, and after a while I came down to try."

"Was it such very important business, Lucelet, that it would not keep until to-morrow? and must it be told to me in solemn seclusion and at the deadest hour of night?"

"I thought I should like to see you by yourself, and when you were not likely to be disturbed——"

"Likely to be disturbed by anyone but yourself, you mean, I suppose, Lucelet?"

Lucelet somehow had no mirth in her to-night. She still looked scared and uneasy, and unlike herself.

"You have been to the House, Victor?" she said, as if she would turn the conversation away from herself.

Before Victor could answer, Money struck in:

"Confess, Lucelet," he said, with something like gravity of tone, "that you expected Victor here; and that that was the reason why you came stealing down to our midnight conference?"

She shook her head.

"No, indeed, dear; it was not that. I did not expect to find Victor here."

"And I ought not to be here," Victor said, "at such an hour as this. You want to talk to your papa, Lucy, and I must not interrupt you." He seemed as if about to go.

"Oh, it's nothing!" Money said. "Can't it be told before Victor, Lucelet—or can't it wait just a little? We were talking of something that would greatly interest you, I know, when you came in; and since you have given us the benefit of your company at a time when you ought to be in bed, I don't object at all to taking you into our council. Do you, Victor?"

"Oh, no, if Lucy would not rather speak to you now alone. I can come in to-morrow, and we can talk of the other matter ——"

"I think when Lucelet hears what it is, she will not be inclined to put it off for any business of her own. It is about Miss Grey, Lucelet."

Lucy looked up with a start, and the colour came again into the face that was pale a moment before.

"About Nola? You have something to say about Nola?"

"Yes, we have. Will you come into council, Lucelet?"

"I don't know—if you wish, yes; what is it about?"

"No, no; it would be cruelty," said Victor resolutely. "It is clear that Lucy is too tired for much consultation; and as she has stayed up for a particular purpose, she ought not to be interfered with. No, thank you, Money; I'll not stay now. It's quite time for me to go."

Lucy made no attempt to induce him to stay. Money looked at her and then at Victor in some surprise.

"Good-night, Lucy," Victor said.

"Good-night, Victor." She put her little cold and tremulous hand into his, and she looked up at him. There was such an expression in her eyes as made Victor's heart thrill with pain. Their eyes met for a moment, and her look was full of unhappiness. There was no complaint in it; there was no angry protest against man, or fate, or heaven, or anything; only such settled unhappiness as one might have thought that young and pretty face could never be made to show. As she looked into his face, and her hand was still held in his, a tear began to gather in the child-like soft eyes, and the little lips began to quiver. She withdrew her hand quickly but not ungently.

Victor was going; Money rose to accompany him to the door, but Victor saw Lucy put her hand upon her father's arm as if to detain him; and he at once insisted that Money must not leave his room. As Heron went out and closed the door behind him, he heard Money say to his daughter:

"Why, Lucelet, my dear, what is this all about?"

Victor hastened away lest he might hear any more. He felt miserably unhappy. He felt conscience-stricken, although it might have puzzled a casuist to say where there could be found anything to blame in any part of his conduct in which Lucy was concerned. It is much to be feared, however, that in real life only those feel the stings of conscience much who have done little to deserve the torture. In the realms of poetry and art, indeed, conscience may "call her furies forth to shake the sounding scourge and hissing snake," and may show "what lesson may be read beside a sinner's restless bed." But in ordinary life the sounding scourge is usually only for the sensitive skin of the man or woman who is always trying to do right, and the regular sinner sleeps a sleep of infantile depth and sweetness. For Victor Heron, although it was not certain that poor Lucy's melancholy eyes had anything to do with him at all, there was little sleep that night. "Conscience, anticipating time," in the lines from which we have just quoted, "already rues the unacted crime." In Heron's case, conscience rued a wrong which it never had been in Heron's heart to do.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### "AND EVEN FOR LOVE WILL BURY LOVE IN EARTH."

WHEN Minola made that sudden confession to Mary Blanchet which was told in a former chapter, she did it under the impulse of a feeling which she could no more restrain than she could explain it. After it was done she was sorry, perhaps, that she had made the confession, but she had no fear that it would be betrayed. Devoted as Mary was to her brother, Minola felt certain that she would never let one word of such a secret escape from her to him; and Minola did not even consider the possibility of her telling it to anyone else. They hardly spoke of it afterwards. Minola only once impressed on Mary the necessity of keeping it the profoundest secret, which, to do the poetess justice, was hardly necessary. If there was one obligation which Mary respected above all others, it was the confidence of a woman's love-secret. She became, if possible, more devoted than ever to her leader; first, because the leader had proved herself a very woman by having a love-secret, and, next, because Minola had confided the secret to her. Mary did not ask who the hero of the secret story might be. She easily got to know that Mr. St. Paul was not the person; because by questions and by inferences she came to understand that he had really offered himself for the place, and had not been accepted. This was a subject of immense delight and pride to Mary. In her wildest dreams of day or night she had never hoped for such an honour as to have a friend who had refused the son of a duke. No matter about the character of the duke's son; no matter if he was cast off by his own family and his own class; all the same he was the son of a duke—nothing could alter that. He, then, being out of the way, it was not, perhaps, very difficult for the astute Mary to guess at the real person; and it did indeed seem to her a great misfortune for her leader to have fallen into an attachment so hopeless as that must be. Still, the sympathies of Miss Blanchet were always rather with hopeless than with hopeful attachments. Minola became in her eyes only all the more interesting, all the more beautiful, all the more womanly and queenly, because of this unhappy love.

One great advantage Minola gained by her sudden outburst of confession was that Mary ceased from that time forth to tell her of her brother's love and disappointment. But Minola did not know that Mary grew rather more hopeful about her brother than before. Since Miss Grey absolutely could not marry the man she loved, there was all the more chance that she might resign herself to marry some one who at least loved her. When Victor Heron was married once for all, then, perhaps, Mary thought, Minola might begin to reconcile herself to realities. Herbert Blanchet's chance might come then after all.

Meanwhile a marked change for the better was coming over Blanchet himself. He really had been awakened, as a certain class of pious person might say, to a sense of the goodness that was in life and in some human hearts. He had had these feelings stirred within him for the first time by Minola's spontaneous kindness. He fell in love with Minola, and he grew ashamed of himself, and the pitiful affectations of his life. He asked her to love him, and he was refused, as we know, but very kindly and considerately. Minola showed, perhaps, only too much consideration for his feelings. She assured him that she had no intention to marry, and that in any case she could not say she felt for him any of the sentiments he professed to feel for her. He went away not without hope, and he set himself to work to redeem his life from the reproach of idleness. Mrs. Money, as we know already, took him lately under her special care as helper of unhappy men. Perhaps she guessed well enough what were his pains and his hopes. He went to see her often, at hours, as she took care it should be, when Minola was not likely to be there. Mrs. Money grew more and more fond of him as she helped him on, and perhaps thought it would not be a bad thing for either if in the end Minola came to marry him. "The dear child must marry some one in the end," Mrs. Money took for granted, and, as she had means enough of her own, why might she not marry this handsome and gifted young fellow? Why might she not come to love him? Of all these ideas Mrs. Money communicated none to her husband, for she knew that he had ideas of his own on the same subject which were not the same as hers. For once, Mr. and Mrs. Money were, as regarded a girl's settlement in life, almost as much divided as Mr. and Mrs. Page. Under the influence of her ideas, however, Mrs. Money was determined to extend a helping hand to the poet. She induced her husband to exert his influence so far on Blanchet's behalf as to recommend him to some newspaper editors whom Mr. Money knew, and to obtain for his talents as a writer of light and brilliant articles a chance of success and pay. The poet went to work very steadily. He joined with a literary friend to take chambers in the Temple; he renounced poetry for the present, until he should have shown that he really had in him a capacity for hard work, and until some inspiration should arise compelling him to attempt a poem, and therefore proving him a man of at least poetic calling. In truth, the meaning of all this was that Blanchet was disappointed, was penitent, was disposed to blame himself for his failure hitherto—another and very subtle and satisfying mood of self-conceit—and that he was ready to plunge from extreme of self-indulgence to extreme of self-restraint.

In all this, however, he was working still with a purpose and a hope. He had in his life experienced most things except prosperity. He had fallen on bad chances and into a bad school for a petulant and fitful nature like his. He had been left for the most part to a companionship which had little regard for the manly virtues of character. He had consoled himself for disappointments and failures by wrapping himself in a ragged mantle of self-conceit, and affectation, and cynicism. It was easier to talk and think with scorn of an unappreciating world than to work patiently to deserve appreciation. The break-down of all this, his strong love for Minola and her generous kindness, together wrought on him so as to dispose him for more wholesome struggles and a fresh life. His self-conceit now worked in a new form. He was strongly persuaded that Minola was only trying what he could do in the way of manly struggle and achievement before she listened to him, and he told himself that the present was, after all, only a period of probation.

Once he allowed some hope of this kind to escape him in talking with his sister, and she did not wholly discourage it. Some faint whisper, some half-breathed, unconscious utterance of hers, filled him, however, with a terrible suspicion. He had never before thought of the possibility of Miss Grey loving anyone if she did not love him. He always complacently regarded her as he regarded fame, as something which, perhaps, has to be wooed amid disappointments, and which may not come all at once or without trouble, but which was sure to be his portion when he had exerted himself enough to deserve it. The new suspicion breathed so unconsciously into his mind by poor Mary filled it with a strange power. It held him day and night. It turned him suddenly and almost completely from his steady work of self-improvement. He felt that he could do nothing until he was clear upon that point, and he set himself to watch and find out.

There never could have been a sermon against suspicion and against mean watchfulness half so impressive as the sum total of what his suspicions and his spyings cost Herbert Blanchet, if he only could have known it. Minola had heard of his steady work from Mrs. Money as well as from Mary, and she was glad of the improvement, and felt a higher respect for him because he had not allowed himself to be wholly crumpled up by a disappointment in love. When all was first known between her and Victor Heron, she felt so miserable and so guilty, that she could have found it in her heart to wish she had married anyone, or gone to the other end of the world, or drowned herself, rather than have Lucy and Heron and herself entangled in such a miserable web of perplexity, and of something like deceit.

One dim, foggy evening, when spring seemed to have suddenly turned back into winter, Minola sat in her room, drearily touching some chords on her piano, and meanwhile asking herself, "What is to be done now? what is to come next?"

"One thing is to be done," she said, speaking aloud and rising from the piano. "I am going out, Mary."

"Isn't it wet and foggy, dear?" Mary asked. Mary never saw any use in going out when the weather was not very fine.

"I don't care, Mary; I'll battle with the elements. Is not that the heroic way of putting it?"

"I suppose so; I wish I were a hero, dear."

"What has become of your poetry, Mary? Your poems ought to be your heroism."

"What has become of them, dear? Oh, I don't know! What has become of everything?"

"Yes," Minola said, in irrepressible despondency; "I wonder what has become of everything we cared about, Mary? I wonder what will become of you and me?"

Mary sighed.

"Oh, you are well enough, Minola dear! you have youth and beauty and everything; and you could do so much good and make people happy, and by making them happy you would be happy yourself."

There was silence for a moment or two.

"How is your brother, Mary?" Minola asked abruptly.

"He is very well, dear," Mary said, looking up timidly. "I think he is very well; he does not complain of anything. He is working very hard, and he tells me it does him good, and he seems very hopeful, I think."

"I am very glad to hear it; indeed I am, Mary," Minola said in an almost penitent tone; and then she made preparations for what she called battling with the elements.

She went her usual way through the Park, thinking sadly enough of the first days when she knew that walk, and when she was full of the joy of her newly-acquired independence. It seemed to her, knowing all that had passed in that short interval, as if no human creature could have shown herself less fitted for independence than she. She began to be sick of her purposeless life, which had, so far as she saw, only brought distress on herself and on her friends. A woman of the world would have thought little of all that had passed—would have thought, perhaps, that nothing that could be called anything had passed. But Minola's proud spirit and sensitive conscience had not been subdued or seared by the ways of the world. She had tried the past chapters of her life, and she had condemned them; and from her own sentence there was no appeal.

Soon Miss Misanthrope stood on the bridge that spans the canal, her favourite spot. She had come there for quiet and for though. The day had been wet and foggy, so much so that at one time it seemed impossible for her to get out of doors at all, and she dreaded a whole day caged up with Mary Blanchet—at least, until she had made up her mind on a question of deep moment to her. But the rain ceased to stream and was succeeded by a thick, warm fog, and Minola did not heed the fog; and so she started for her solitary walk. By the time she had crossed the Park the fog was beginning to lift, and when she stood on the bridge she saw a curious and a very lovely sight. On the canal, across it, all along its banks for a certain distance, the heavy, damp fog brooded. It brooded thick, and soft, and dank, as though the season were early winter instead of late spring rapidly melting into summer. It was rather late in the evening; the appearance of the scene was for a certain distance around rather that of a November night than of a spring evening, however late.

But high up in the heavens, above the region of the fog, the sky was clear, was all of a faint delicate blue, and the moon was now bright. Immediately beneath Minola's feet, in the water, the reflection of the moon was brilliant, and the sluggish ripples were glorified in its light. Yet if she allowed her gaze to follow the canal, though but a very little way, she came on the fog-bank and the region of the mist again. So, if she raised her eyes slowly from the canal to the sky, she saw in succession of almost imperceptible change the murky hue of the water in the fog, the blackish grey of the spectral trees seen dimly through it, and then shades of softening grey, until in some manner which the gazer could not clearly make out the grey had all given way to the pale blue, and at last, following the lighting heaven to the source of light, she reached the glittering effulgent yellow in which the moon was circled. A strange and beautiful condition of atmosphere and sky thus brought the fogs and chilly waters of November and the soft blue skies and mild moonlight of May into one picture.

The picture had this effect upon Minola, that it took her for the moment away from her own brooding troubles. It told her, too, that, come what would, the beauty of sky and water would remain a living possession for her. She began to wonder whether, after all, we do not exaggerate in our romantic or petulant moods those sorrows that are said to be especially of the heart. It seemed to her, under the softening and purifying influence of the scene around, that there was much left for her to do and to enjoy in life. Hers was a nature of that mould that is peculiarly alive to the influences of sky, and scene, and atmosphere—a nature that under other conditions of training would have been profoundly superstitious, and for which, to adopt the picturesque expression of Schiller, the door of the ghost-kingdom would easily open. Had she not been brought up in prosaic and well-informed England of the midland counties it is probable that the door of that ghost-kingdom would always have stood ajar for her, and that amid the commonplace work and joys of every day she would often have had sight of the vast lost regions of the supernatural—that Eden of fearful fascination from which man, by reason of his eating the fruit of the tree of science, has shut himself out. But, even as it was, she retained enough of the thrilling temperament that admits of superstition to feel peculiarly influenced, now encouraged, and now depressed, by the movement of a cloud, the gleam of a star, the sudden, unexpected ripple of water among concealing reeds. Therefore as she stood this night, and studied the picture all around her, she felt her soul growing exalted, and saw the heavy mists of her personal troubles begin to roll away and show some gleam of brightness beyond.

When she came slowly away she was filled with a resolve. If it was not a very wise one, it was at least unselfish, and it was the result of the calmest thought she could take, alone and wholly uncounselled. She had clearly seen for some time that her first theory of life was all a failure. It had completely broken down. She brooded hopelessly over this mournful conviction for a while, and then, like all beings of healthy, unselfish nature, she began to ask herself what was to be done next? She could not give up all her life to grieving over the irreparable. It was not enough for her to sit down and cry because things had not gone well with her. Something must be done; what was to be done?

She could not remain in London and live this kind of life any more. It would be intolerable if she had to run the risk of meeting Victor Heron day after day. She knew well enough his sudden energy of nature, and she feared for him more than for herself that he might make some effort to break away from the pledge that as yet alone held him to poor Lucy. It seemed clear to Minola that in the miserable game of cross-purposes they had been playing they had left no way out except with unhappiness to some one. It was equally clear to her that Lucy ought not to be the sufferer. She did not doubt that time would soften or wholly remove the effect of his mistake and his disappointment for Victor Heron, and that he would come to love Lucy as she ought to be loved, and to be as happy as men can well expect to be. When a thing is inevitable she knew that souls with any manhood in them will always make the best of it; and she well knew that Heron's was a soul filled with genuine manhood. The one thing, therefore, most needful to be done was to make the complete separation of herself and Victor inevitable.

.At first she had ideas of going to live far away from England. She spent more than one musing hour in thinking on the place to be chosen for her retreat. She thought of the East, and was almost amused at the idea of her being another Hester Stanhope, for in her very childish days Hester Stanhope used to be a sort of heroine with her. She thought of Rome; and, indeed, her heart yearned for a life wholly given up to Rome. She thought of Athens; and she thought, too, of the fresh, new world across the Atlantic, where every new idea and every free assertion of individual energy is believed to have a fuller and fairer chance of justifying itself than here among us. But there came up amid all these dreamings the reflection that, after all, this would be doing little good for any mortal but herself. It would only be a sort of sensuality of the soul indulged to the full. It was then the thought rose in her mind that perhaps it was her duty to make some manner of sacrifice for the happiness of some one else. "I cannot be happy myself in my own way," she said to herself; "that is certain. Why should I not try to order things so that, by some self-denial, I may yet be the means of making some one else more happy than he might otherwise be?" How very happy she might make poor Mary Blanchet by marrying her brother! And Blanchet, too, who professed to love her so much—and who was surely quite sincere, for Minola had lately learned to have great faith in the sincerity of human love—if she could make him happy, would it not be a better use to which to put her life than to moon it away in the indulgence of a vain lament for the unattainable? There were some gifts in him, and under favouring auspices they might shine into something really great. Why should she not apply her life to the task of endeavouring to give them a full development? It seemed to Minola that this would be a far better way of spending her youth than surrendering it wholly to solitude and her own indulgence in vain regret. One dread sometimes made her shudder at the idea. Suppose Victor Heron were to think that she never really had had any steady and enduring love for him? Suppose he set her as down as a woman of no real heart, no strong emotion at all? But then came quick as a ray of light the conviction, "He will never think that;" and afterwards, in melancholy resignation, the reflection, "If he should, it is only all the better."

So she made up her mind. The resolve was an unwise one, no doubt. A girl who had known more of the world's ways would never have made it—at least, she would never have made it with such a purpose and such a hope. A woman of the world might have married for money when she could not get the man she loved; she would have married for a home, and a protector, and a settlement, and all the rest of it; and we should most of us have said that she did sensibly and well. She might have married to please her father and mother, as the good girls were always taught that it was their duty to do in the formal old days, and her filial piety would have been applauded. But the idea of marrying a poor young man without even the excuse of loving him, the idea of marrying him merely because he loved her, and she thought she might do him good, and make his life happy; this would undoubtedly have seemed to all sensible persons not only very absurd, but perhaps rather unwomanly as well. Such, however, was the resolve Minola made, and it was made deliberately and in honest purpose for the right. In the perplexed way of her life she saw nothing better to do than this. This would secure the happiness of poor Lucy, who then would never know that her happiness had been in danger;

it would make Heron's course clear and inevitable; it would perhaps make Blanchet happy; it would certainly make Mary very happy; and for Minola herself, it would at least give her the knowledge that her life was of some use to some human hearts. She came away from the Park with a resolve. In that sense she was less unhappy than before.

"I will see Herbert Blanchet. I will trust to his honour and his generosity. I will tell him that I love—that I did love—a man whom I cannot marry; and, if he is willing to have me for his wife with that knowledge, I shall not hold back any longer."

"After all, perhaps I shall thus be acting out my part of Miss Misanthrope in the spirit and the letter," she said, with a gleam of her old humour, as she walked homeward.

"Mary, I should like to see your brother very much, and as soon as he could come," Minola said to her companion that evening, as they sat alone, and tried to get up an appearance of their old cheerfulness.

Mary looked up surprised.

"I am sure, Minola, he ought to be only too delighted; but do you think it would be well to ask him to come?"

"Would it be any harm?"

"He feels such a great deal, you know; or, indeed, I don't think you could well know. There are feelings we can all only have for ourselves. I am afraid, Minola dear, it would only renew his unhappiness, poor fellow. He loves you so much, Minola."

Minola coloured and felt distressed. Almost her heart failed her, but she kept to her purpose.

"If I wanted to see him very particularly, Mary, don't you think he would come then?"

Mary looked up again in doubled wonder. A wild hope came into her mind which she would not dare to express, but which set her all trembling and brought the tears into her eyes.

"Oh, yes, Minola dearest, of course he would come! Of course he must know, as well as I know, that you would not bring him here to give him needless pain, and that you have some good purpose."

"I want to say something to him very particularly, Mary, which I think now I ought to say. I want to ask him something. I don't know how he will answer it; but I feel that I ought to give him the chance of answering it. Now, don't begin puzzling your head about it, Mary dear; you will know it all soon, whatever way things turn out; but at present, dear, it specially concerns him and me, and I could not tell even you, Mary, until I had spoken to him first."

Mary was a little cast down from her wild hopes. She feared that, after all, it was only some explanation Minola proposed to give to Herbert, with a view, perhaps, of making him more reconciled to his fate, a result about which Mary had but little hope. She accepted her part, however, and promised to go and see her brother the very first thing in the morning.

It would be needless to deny that, in thinking over her project of self-sacrifice, Minola had thought of other names as well as that of Herbert Blanchet. She had thought, for instance, of her too faithful old lover, Mr. Sheppard; but she could not see the possibility of a life spent with Mr. Sheppard. She did not see that she could be of any manner of use to him in his career; rather, indeed, she felt that she must necessarily be something of a hindrance. Then there was no Mary Blanchet in that case to be joined in the objects of the sacrifice. Mr. Sheppard had money enough, and wanted no help in that way. Her money might enable Blanchet, she thought, to give his genius full sway—to give it its head, without regard to prudence, and publishers, and pot-boilers. "I suppose he has genius; I think he has genius," she kept saying to herself. If she was to sacrifice herself—and this must in any case be an absolute sacrifice—she felt she must justify the act to her own heart and conscience by the assurance that it would do the fullest good in her power to do.

When Mary, full of doubt and hope, went to see her brother next morning, she was startled by the change that appeared to have suddenly taken place in him. He seemed to have thrown away his hard-working mood, and to be reckless and almost ferocious. When Mary told him she had brought him a message from Minola, he looked almost as if she had said she brought a warrant for his arrest.

"What does she want of me, Mary? You must know. Come, let us hear it; tell it out."

"But, Herbert dear, indeed I don't know. She did not tell me anything."

"And you don't guess, my sister?" he asked, with a sickly smile that made her uncomfortable to see.

"No, Herbert. She only said that she wanted to ask you a question, and that you ought to have a chance of answering it, or something of that kind."

"Yes, I thought so. Very well, Mary; tell her I will not go; tell her to think anything she likes of me—the very worst will not be too bad; but I will not see her."

He turned his back on his sister. Mary, however, had seen him in heroic and in despondent moods often enough not to feel quite discouraged by this demonstration. She endeavoured to argue with him; and ventured to hint that probably he might find everything turning out for the very best when he came to speak with Minola.

"You think so?" he asked, with a laugh. "Very well, Mary, I will go; it may as well be got done with once for all. Come, my sister, let us go. Are you to be present at the interview, Mary?"

"No, Herbert; oh, no! She wants to speak to you alone first. But I dare say I shall know some time."

"I dare say you will; I only wonder you have not known it already. Tell me, Mary; don't you think one had best tell the truth, when it is certain that he must be found out if he tells a lie?"

"Oh, Herbert, what a question!"

"You think it very absurd, don't you? Well, Mary, there is some sense in it, too. You may be sure I shall answer Miss Grey's question very truthfully to-day."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### LEFT LONELY.

That was a time of strange and painful emotion during which Minola waited for the coming of Blanchet and his sister. There were moments when she would have given all the world to be able to recall what she had said and done. There were even moments of agonising reaction, when she felt inclined to descend the stairs softly, and open the door, and go into the street, and disappear for evermore somehow from the sight of all who knew her. Once or twice she covered her face with her hands as if she felt an intolerable shame. Once or twice she burst into tears. She was only sustained by the thought that the extraordinary step she had resolved on would secure poor Lucy's happiness, and that it would make both Mary Blanchet and her brother very happy. Other way to make her wretched failure of a life useful to any human creature she saw none. She got up and walked about the room like some half wild and caged creature, whose limitations sometimes become almost unbearable. She was terrified at the fate she had brought upon herself; she looked back with miserable regret to the few free and happy days she had spent when she first came to London. "Let no wretched woman ever try to be independent!" she cried out in her bitterness.

What a long time they were in coming! for now she began to wish that the interview were over, and anything resolved upon that could not be undone. Trifling little things came into her mind, and perplexed and distressed her. If, for instance, Mary Blanchet should remain in the room! "If she is there I shall not be able to say out what I want to say," Minola thought; "and if she wishes to remain, will she think it strange and wrong if I ask her not to stay? If it is all settled, how shall I have to behave to him? Will he understand that I am not going to play any love part? If he comes, and I tell him all this, and he is content, then will he kiss me, and must I seem willing to be kissed? Will he accept me at all on such terms?——" A wild gleam of hope lit up within her for a moment, and then died out. "Oh, yes, he will accept me—he does not care!" she said; and she trembled with pain and shame at the strange humiliation she had brought upon herself. She will never forget the agony of that hour while she waited there alone.

At length they are come. She heard the voice of Mary apparently reasoning with Blanchet. Then one point of perplexity was presently settled for her, because the door opened and Mr. Blanchet came in, and he was alone. Minola heard the soft patter of Mary's receding feet. Then a sudden revulsion took place in her feelings, and she wished that Mary had come in with her brother. It was too late now, however, to think of that, for Blanchet was in the room unaccompanied, and came towards her.

Minola was greatly surprised and even shocked at the appearance of Blanchet. She would have been still more pained if she could have persuaded herself that his present aspect and manner were the result of his love, and that she was to blame for having brought him to this pass. But there was something sullen and almost fierce about him which did not seem even to her inexperienced eyes to speak merely of the pangs of misprized love. He looked like a man who has come to meet an accusation and is determined to brazen it out. His very manner of saluting her had in it something of defiance which was strangely unlike his old ways of poetic devotion, when he used to place himself, metaphorically at least, at her feet, and look up to her as his patroness and saint.

Perhaps Minola now wished she had not sent for him. Perhaps her mind misgave her as to her purpose of self-sacrifice. Perhaps she would gladly have had Mary Blanchet or anyone else in the room, to bear her company.

She had sent for Mr. Blanchet, however, and she had to receive him becomingly. It seemed marvellous to her now how she ever could have invited him with the intention of offering herself to him to be his wife. Taking her courage, as the French phrase has it, in her two hands, she went to meet Herbert with a friendly greeting.

To her surprise Blanchet did not take her hand when she offered it, but made a bow, and placed himself at some distance from her, standing near the chimney-piece.

"I know why you have sent for me, Miss Grey," he said, "and I had better not take your hand until we understand one another. I am told by Mary that you wish to ask me a question. Well, let me save you trouble and myself too. I answer the question at once. I say yes—yes!"

Then the poet threw back his dark hair, and stood as one who cares not now what is to follow. If he had ever been a reader or a stage-struck admirer of Shakespeare, one might have supposed that the attitude and look were got up after Othello, when he says, "'Twas I that killed her," and is thenceforth prepared for the worst.

This was a mystery to Minola. It seemed absolutely impossible that he could have learned or guessed at the nature of the question she had meant to put to him. It had only been settled in her own mind the evening before, and was never whispered, even to the reeds along the canal. Nor even if he had known it by supernatural inspiration did his tone and manner seem appropriate to the occasion, and to the answer he had given.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Blanchet, and you can't, I think, have any idea of the reason why I asked you to come and see me."

"Yes, yes; I know it very well—only too well."

"Then you must tell me what it is; for, really, Mr. Blanchet, if you know it, I don't."

Minola seated herself quietly on a little sofa, and waited for him to explain all this. His theatrical ways were so absurd and offensive in her eyes that they impelled her to fall back upon a reserved and distant demeanour. He could hardly have gone mad, she thought; and in any case she now only wished to be well out of the whole affair. Minola could not believe that real emotion and stage-play could go together in the one part in private life, and she judged Blanchet wrongly for this reason. There are people in whom the instinct of the theatrical is as strong as the common instinct of self-preservation. Blanchet was as much in earnest now and as near to actual despair as he could be in this life.

"Oh, yes, I know!" he said, "and I may as well save you all trouble in reproaching me. You need not tell me you despise me, Miss Grey; you can't despise me more than I despise myself. You need not tell me I have been ungrateful; I know that there never was a more ungrateful wretch on earth. If you could care for any thanks from me or believe in their sincerity, I would thank you for one thing—for not telling poor Mary anything about this. It was like your magnanimous nature to do this. She will come to know of it some time, I suppose; but not from you—not from you."

Minola began to be really alarmed and shocked. This was no play-acting. His eyes were burning with wild emotion. He was in thorough earnest. Her idea was that he must have committed some crime and got it into his head that she knew of it. She got up and went kindly over to him. He shrank away.

"We are talking at cross-purposes, Mr. Blanchet; and I am afraid you are going to tell me something I ought not to know. You must not say any more—at least, without thinking of what you are saying. I have no reproach to make against you, Mr. Blanchet; what could I have? If you have done anything that deserves all the reproach you are giving to yourself, I don't know anything of it—and indeed I don't believe it."

"You don't know; you really don't know?" and his eyes lighted up with a momentary ray of surprise and hope. Then he became despairing again. "You are sure to know before long; and I may as well tell you myself."

"No, no, Mr. Blanchet, I don't want to know; I have no right to know. Pray don't say any more—let us ask Mary to come in." He put his hand upon her arm and stayed her.

"No, no, you must hear it all now; we had better have an end to it. It concerns you, Miss Grey, and you have a right to know of it. 'Twas I who saw you and Heron in St. James's Park; it was I who told Lucy Money, and made you seem a treacherous friend to her; 'twas I who did mischief that I suppose can never be set right, and did it all to the only woman in the world who ever was really kind to me. Yes—what do you think of me now?"

Minola felt herself growing giddy and sick as he talked on in his wild way. Little as she understood of what he was saying, yet she knew enough to make her feel as if the ground reeled beneath her. It was enough that Victor and she had been seen and watched and misunderstood by somebody, and that all her efforts to make things happy for Lucy were in vain. For the moment she did not think of herself. She knew that there was nothing she had done to be ashamed of, or which two simple words to Lucy would not explain. But when that explanation once began, where was it to stop? For the moment she did not even think of the degradation to herself in having her movements watched, and reported, and misrepresented; or of the shameful ingratitude of Blanchet, whom, an hour ago, she almost looked upon as her destined husband.

Blanchet now stood leaning both his elbows on the chimney-piece, his head turned away from her.

"Mr. Blanchet," Minola said quietly, "you say you have done me some great wrong. There is just one favour you can do me now, and that is, to tell me in the simplest words what you saw, and what you said of it, and why you came to say it."

She stood and waited, with a manner seemingly of the most perfect composure. Within her breast all was pain, shame, anger, and distraction. But she contrived to keep an air of entire self-restraint and calmness. It appeared to her that the mere dignity of womanhood exacted from her that much of self-control at least.

Then Blanchet told his story. It was a little incoherent here and there, and dashed with theatric expressions of passion and despair. But its general purpose was only too clear. He was going to call on Mrs. Money that unhappy day, and as he was crossing the Park he saw Victor Heron seated, and apparently waiting for some one. The poet confessed that, prompted by some demon of jealousy and suspicion, he watched, and he saw Minola come up, and he saw them meet and saw them walk together. Then, still and further inspired by the demon on whom he was disposed to throw so much responsibility, he hastened to Mrs. Money's house; he learned that Heron had left a full hour before Minola; he even found out that they had parted formally from each other; and then he told Lucy for her private information that he had just seen them together in the Park, an hour after Heron had left Lucy declaring that he must hasten to the House of Commons.

Minola heard all this, bending her head slightly every now and then to signify that she understood his meaning. At the end she quietly asked what Lucy had said to the story he told her.

She looked very pale, Blanchet said; but she only begged of him not to say anything to her mother, and then she went away. But he saw too well, he added, that she was struck to the heart by what she had heard. Then first, when his rage of jealousy and madness had passed away, he began to understand the full measure of his shame. When Minola sent for him—to ask him a question, as Mary had told him—he felt sure it was to put the question of guilty or not guilty. He might as well plead guilty at once. It must all come out. There must be explanations, and he must stand confessed. That did not trouble him now, he said. His one only thought was that Minola had been his best friend in all the world, and that he had betrayed her.

Minola listened to these explanations with a heart in which scorn and anger were longing for utterance, but with serene and imperturbable composure. Once again she thought to herself, "Yes, it is true—women are born hypocrites;" and she thought, too, "I am glad of it just now."

"Things are not quite so bad as your excited conscience would make them out, I hope, Mr. Blanchet," she said, with a half smile of contempt. "It was not well done of you to play such a part, nor exactly what I should have expected; but I hope it will prove that you have not done much harm to anyone—except to your own feelings and conscience, of course. I met Mr. Heron by the merest chance that day in the Park, and I never met him there or anywhere else except by chance. That can be explained in two words, if Miss Money thinks any explanation necessary. She will believe anything I tell her or that Mr. Heron tells her."

Blanchet shook his head.

"You think she will not believe him or me?" Minola asked, with quiet contempt. "Oh, yes, Mr. Blanchet, you are mistaken!"

"I didn't mean to doubt that," the poet said, with downcast head. To do him justice he had not the least doubt that either Minola or Heron would tell the truth; his doubt was whether the full acknowledgment would be entirely satisfactory to Lucy Money; and Minola guessed his meaning.

"That, at any rate, can be left to Miss Money's own judgment, Mr. Blanchet. I was only anxious to assure you that you have not after all done so much harm as you seemed to fear just now."

She looked very cold and cruel. As he turned his eyes to hers he caught no light of ancient kindness or pity in them; only a cold and merciless dislike and contempt. He cast one abject, penitent glance at her, a glance that seemed to implore for some merciful consideration.

"You don't even reproach me," he said, appealing to her with outstretched hands of sudden passion and despair.

"Oh, no! I have no right to complain of anything you may choose to say. You did see me in the Park with Mr. Heron; it is quite true. You have said nothing untrue of me; what right have I to complain?"

Then she made a slight, hardly perceptible movement—one of those movements which it comes by nature to even the least affected women to make, and which convey so much with such little effort. It indicated to Blanchet, beyond the possibility of mistake, that the interview was at an end.

"At least try to forgive me," he said despairingly. "I thought all you Christians were bound to do that."

"It is not a question of forgiving," she said with the same composed air; "I have no power to punish, Mr. Blanchet, and I don't see why we should speak of forgiving. You don't ask me, I suppose, to think just the same of you to-day as I thought yesterday? I could hardly do that, even as a Christian duty."

As Blanchet was hurrying out of the house he met his sister in the hall. She ran to him with inquiring eyes, seeking in his face for some sign of coming happiness to all of them. He stopped and looked at her, and then a sudden thought seemed to take possession of him, and he caught her arm.

"Come away with me," he said; "get your things and come away this moment. This is no place for you."

She has refused him again, poor Mary thought. Oh, why then did she send for him at all?

"But, Herbert, my dear, how can I leave her? Do you want me to go away from Minola for ever?"

"Yes, yes, for ever. Come away this moment, I tell you. I'll take care of you; I'll provide for you, if that is it. But come away from this place. We have no right to be here, either of us."

"What has she said to you, Herbert—what have you done?"

"She has said nothing to me; I wish she had said something to me. What have I done? I have acted like a treacherous cad——"

"Oh, Herbert, it can't be!"

"It is, I tell you. Come away from this, Mary; you have no right to be here; come away this moment, I tell you."

His energy quite overbore poor Mary. She had never seen him in such a mood before; indeed she had never seen anyone else in such a mood. She could no more have stood out against him than against a storm. But the idea of her going away from Minola seemed like an overturning of the world.

"But won't you tell me what this is all about? What have you done, Herbert? Why must I leave her? How could I live without her? What would she say?"

"I'll tell you all when you come with me; I'll tell you nothing now. Get your things; I will give you five minutes—go along, Mary, and be quick."

Mary looked wildly up and down as one who hopes, perhaps, that some supernatural intervention may come at the last moment to rescue her from a doom which she has no strength to fight against herself. She looked up the stairs and along the hall, and even to the ceiling. Nothing came to save her. She burst into tears.

"Come," said Herbert, turning his dark eyes on her with a wildness in them which she could not trifle with any longer.

"I'll come, Herbert; I'll come."

She ran upstairs; she rushed into the room where Minola was, and clasped Minola in her arms, and clung about her and kissed her, and stammered some incoherent words of fondness and good-bye, and ran out again before Minola could understand what she meant or what she was about to do. In another moment Minola heard the street door shut, and going to the window saw Mary hurrying off with her brother.

Minola felt dazed by the sudden occurrences of the day. She looked after the departing figures of Mary Blanchet and her brother, and at first could hardly understand the situation. Then she turned and looked into the darkening lonely room, and she felt very much alone indeed.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE MAN WITHOUT A GRIEVANCE.

The man with the grievance had got his chance at last. His time had come. The hopes with which he came over to England, and which had so often seemed to fail and fade from him, were likely to be realised now. He was about to have a hearing for his cause. He was to make his statement in the presence of all England—that is to say, from the floor of the House of Commons. The night fixed for the hearing of Victor Heron's motion in the House had come, and it had excited a great deal of public interest, and was certain of a patient consideration.

The destinies had surely been very kind to Heron since his coming to England. He thought of this as he was crossing the Park from his lodgings to get to the House of Commons this particular evening, and found his nerves becoming tremulous with the anticipation of the coming fight, of the speech he had to make, and of the success which he felt confident the justice of his case must win for it. When he landed in England, under a sort of cloud and otherwise obscure, he found at first that it was hardly possible to get anyone of influence even to listen to what he had to say. He could not now but admire, to use the old phrase, the change which had been wrought for him in the condition of things. There was a time when he would readily have given ten or twenty years of his life for the chance that now was coming so easily to him. He ought to be a proud and happy man. Proud he might perhaps have been, were it not that he felt terribly nervous now that the time was so near; but happy he certainly did not feel. To be happy in any manner of political success, or at least to enjoy it thoroughly, one ought to have no heart, he began to think. He was very unhappy; his unhappiness rose up between him and his grievance—between him and his speech. He was glad to take refuge in the thought of the inevitable speech, and in the nervous trepidation that it called up; even that was better than thinking of other things. He endeavoured to fix his attention exclusively on the approaching debate, and to make himself believe that the end of all things would come the moment it was over. He had gained the great object of his life—at least, he stood on the direct way to gain it—and this was the spirit in which he received the crowning of his hopes.

Mr. Augustus Sheppard went down to the House that night to hear the debate. It was not a party question, everyone said, and he was free to wish that Victor might gain his cause. Indeed, it was Victor himself who was obtaining a seat for his former rival to hear the debate. Mr. Sheppard quite understood now that it was good form to be on friendly terms with a man whom you had opposed unsuccessfully at an election. He had some interest, too, of his own in the present debate and in Heron's success. There was a general impression that if Heron made out a real case the Government would certainly give him the very next good appointment in the colonial administrations that came to their hand; and Sheppard assumed that that and not a parliamentary life would be the object of Heron's ambition. Heron then would resign the seat for Keeton which he had only obtained by a fluke; and Mr. Sheppard would have a capital opportunity next time, when it was not likely that the odd chances that had defeated him could occur again. He felt still a sort of superstitious longing for success at Keeton, because it had so long been in his hopes; and he had a faith that if he carried Keeton he would also carry Minola Grey. He was, then, in a peculiarly hopeful mood as he walked towards the House of Commons the evening of Heron's motion.

Mr. Sheppard was a little too early; he generally took care to be a little early for everything. He was never known to be late for an appointment. He began to walk more slowly when he came near Westminster Palace, for he saw by the clock on the tower that he had plenty of time to spare. He slowly entered Westminster Hall, and found himself entangled in a crowd there. A case of some public interest was going on in one of the law courts on the right of the hall, and people were waiting to see some of the witnesses pass out; while on the left of the hall others were watching to see members of Parliament pass in. Sheppard remembered that the case was one in which a good many noblemen were more or less interested, and that among others the duke, who was his feudatory chief, had expressed some opinion about it, and had even been present at some of the sittings of the court. He stood a moment, therefore, with a sort of respectful and well-regulated curiosity, and he asked a question of one or two persons around him; and it happened that he saw a friend or two passing through the crowd, and he interchanged a few words. He pleased himself with thinking of the time, now perhaps very near, when people would see him passing into the House of Commons with other members, and then he began to make his way forward, believing it not becoming that a person of such expectations should be seen standing in a curious crowd. He was making his way clear of the throng when a tall man passed him, whose appearance seemed familiar to Mr. Sheppard. Mr. Sheppard, however, went on his way; but the other stopped and looked after him, and then strode in pursuit and speedily overtook him. A hand was laid on Mr. Sheppard's shoulder, and a friendly voice was heard in his ear.

"Hullo, Sheppard—how are you? Don't bear malice, I hope—especially as I lost as well as you."

Mr. Sheppard turned round and saw a figure which he could not mistake. He forgot, however, for the moment some of the conditions under which the figure chose to present itself to society; and he began in a doubtful and embarrassed tone:

"Oh, yes; I beg your pardon, Lord Hugh——"

"I say, Sheppard, cut that! I have dropped all that sort of thing; I'm the opposite to the dog, don't you know, in the fable: he dropped the substance to get at the shadow; I drop the shadow seeing that I can't have the substance; and I think you'll own, Sheppard, that I am the more sensible animal of the two."

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. St. Paul."

"Thank you, Sheppard, it's very kind of you. You don't look particularly pleased, and that makes it all the more good of you to say it." And Mr. St. Paul laughed his familiar laugh.

"Well, we met last time under circumstances that don't of themselves tend to make men pleased to see each other, Mr. St. Paul," Sheppard said; for he was not to be long kept in awe of a person of noble family when that person was not respectable in his conduct, and was not on good terms with the head of the house.

"I don't know; it was a fair fight, Sheppard; I lost as well as you. I dare say if I had got in, you would have had a petition?"

"I think it highly probable we should have taken some such course, Mr. St. Paul. There would certainly have seemed to be some justification for such a course."

"I wonder who would have paid the expenses if there had been a petition against me."

"I should have found the means to pay them, Mr. St. Paul."

"Found the means, I dare say; but would not the means have been found in my brother's purse, Sheppard?"

"I am not dependent on your noble brother, Mr. St. Paul, greatly as I respect him, and as everyone must respect him."

"Quite right, Sheppard; quite right. But we will not fight about that now. I am going off again, and I had rather part company on good terms with as many old friends as will do me the favour to be civil to me."

"I thought you had left England, Mr. St. Paul."

"No; I am getting off to-morrow or next day; one has such a lot of things to do, don't you know. But, I say, have you heard the news about our old friend Money?"

"No, I have heard nothing about Mr. Money or his family," Sheppard said with some appearance of interest. "Nothing bad, I hope. I should be sorry if——"

"Well, that is pretty much as you choose to take it. I should not call it bad to leave this confounded country; but I don't know how you may look at the matter."

"Is Mr. Money going to leave the country?"

"Right away. He has sent in his retiring address to his constituents. A chance for you there, Sheppard, perhaps. Money helped to put a Liberal in for Keeton—you might retaliate by getting yourself in for his borough."

"But why does he take so strange and sudden a step? Not any business calamity, surely?"

"No, no; a business affair, but not a business calamity—unless your patriotic soul, Sheppard, sees a calamity in anything done by a Briton in the service of a foreign country. Our friend Money is going to let the Emperor of Russia have all the benefit of his services as an inventor and constructor of engines chiefly used in the unchristian work of destruction."

"Indeed? You astonish me."

"Do I? I am glad of it; it is something to have anyone to astonish with a piece of news. *I* knew it must come to this long ago. It was all very well while everything looked peaceful, and the lion lying down with the lamb, and all that sort of thing, *you* know. But, by Jove! we may have a big fight now any day, and our friend would soon find he couldn't serve the two masters.

He's a sensible fellow—Money; and he makes his choice while he can do so decently, without actually seeming to go over to the enemy, don't you know. Of course, he is quite right; we wouldn't pay him, and t'other party will; and why should he not get the best pay he can in times like these, Sheppard, my boy? That's business, isn't it? We all live by business, you know."

"Still, I should have thought that there was more of patriotic feeling in Mr. Money—and he having sat so long in Parliament too——"

"Ah, that's it, you know!" St. Paul said carelessly. "He has been behind the scenes, and sees how things are done; you have not as yet. He knows what it all comes to; he is a sensible fellow—Money; you may be sure he knows uncommonly well what he is about, Sheppard. I knew this long time it must come to this."

"And this is beyond doubt?" Sheppard asked, still dubitating, and at the same time trying to follow out a train of ideas applying to himself more exclusively.

"True as Gospel. I have just read his retiring address—in which, however, he takes good care, of course, not to be very explicit about the cause of his going off; and I have been talking to the man who is going to marry his daughter in a few days."

"Oh, Mr. Heron?"

"No, not Heron; the other man—I forget his name, who was at the bar, you know—I remember him at Oxford; the fellow who marries the elder sister——"

Mr. Sheppard signified that he understood the meaning of Mr. St. Paul's reference.

"Well, of course, he did not say exactly what I knew to be the fact; but he did not contradict it. I fancy he is not very sorry that Money is going out of the country. He wants to be in society, you know; and, of course, Money is not just the sort of father-in-law for a man in society."

"You don't know, Mr. St. Paul," Sheppard said, becoming almost friendly in his anxiety to learn all about this affair; "you don't know, I suppose, whom Mr. Money takes with him to Russia?"

"No, I don't know; only his wife, I suppose. If the other girl marries our young friend Heron, it isn't likely she would be going off to Russia, I suppose. They say Heron will get a colony somewhere. Well, glad to see you, Sheppard; good-bye."

"You are very kind, I'm sure, Mr. St. Paul," Sheppard said with a certain fervour, for he really thought it was friendly of St. Paul to speak to him so good-humouredly after all that had passed between them on the memorable night of the riot at Keeton.

St. Paul laughed.

"I am going to be a great deal more kind to you now, Sheppard; for I'm going to leave you just in time to save your credit. I see my brother coming; and if you were caught in conference with me, you would never set foot inside any house of his again. Good bye, Sheppard."

St. Paul nodded, smiled, and turned away. Sheppard stood for a moment and looked after his great stooping form, as it made its way out through the crowd, and then he prepared to pay his respects to the chief of the ducal house. He felt a little humiliated by the parting words of St. Paul, but it must be confessed that it was a source of some gladness to him not to be found in parley with the disreputable younger brother when the duke came up. The duke was hurrying by, and only gave Mr. Sheppard a hand to shake, and a "How d'ye-do, Sheppard?" But this was something to have got unalloyed by any qualification or suspicion which the presence of St. Paul might have infused into it.

But even while the dry cool fingers of the duke were still in his momentary possession, Mr. Sheppard was thinking of how the disappearance of the Money family from Minola's horizon would affect his chances with her. He thought of this as he sat and listened to Victor Heron's speech. It may be said, in passing, that Sheppard did not greatly admire the speech. It seemed to him to want order and finish. He was surprised that Heron should have plunged into the subject so directly. Mr. Sheppard had been studying rhetoric of late, and he had formed for himself a very clear idea of how Victor's subject ought to be treated. He thought the speaker should have begun with a sketch of the growth and greatness of England's colonial system; should have shown how the glory of England depends in great measure on the way in which she governs her colonies; should have had a good deal to say about the manner in which the great Mr. Pitt had condemned slavery; might even, perhaps, have quoted a passage from Mr. Pitt's famous peroration about the sunlight streaming in upon the mind of Africa as it did, while he spoke, through the windows of the House of Commons; and thus brought the House, as it were, into tune with the particular question to be debated that day. Victor did nothing of all this, but began in an easy conversational tone, and in three sentences was right into the heart of his subject, only warming into anything like eloquence as he came to deal with occasional passages on which he felt deeply, and then as soon as possible resuming the quietly argumentative tone again. The

House seemed to like it evidently, and Sheppard heard people near him saying it was going to be a great success. Mr. Sheppard was a little astonished, but felt that he ought to be pleased for more reasons than one. He was satisfied he could make a far more eloquent speech than that; and if that sort of thing was successful, he might fairly expect to take rank among the great orators of the House when he got his chance.

But he was only thinking of all this at passing moments. For the most part his mind was occupied with thoughts of Minola, and of the manner in which the departure of the Moneys would affect her and by consequence him. If Mr. and Mrs. Money went to Russia, and Heron and his wife went to some colony, then Minola would be left almost absolutely alone in London. He knew the girl too well to think that she would look for new friends. Surely, then, she would come to value his steady, faithful love? He would have become a success by that time, and no woman is indifferent to success. She would see that in his love there was nothing interested or selfish. Indeed, his love for her was not selfish in the ordinary sense. It would have surprised both him and her to know it, but it was true all the same that in one respect at least he did strongly resemble her beloved Alceste. His extreme love went so far as to form wishes against her who was its object: he could have wished that she were reduced to miserable condition—that Heaven, in giving her birth, had given her nothing—that she had neither money nor friends—in order that he might have the happiness of seeing her depend for everything upon the helping hand of his love. Mr. Sheppard was less acquainted even with Tibullus than with Molière, but the Latin poet had expressed many hundreds of years before Alceste the wish that often filled Sheppard, as it had filled Minola's hero, the "*Utinam possis uni mihi bella videri, displiceas aliis; sic ego tutus ero.*" This wish was strong in Sheppard's mind while Victor Heron was addressing the House. Indeed, no love from the most romantic and passionate lover could have been a better tribute to a woman's worth than that of Sheppard for Minola Grey. All her other lovers were taking her on mere trust. All the others were caught by some charm in her which they could perhaps not define. She might for aught they could tell be in reality something quite different from what she seemed to be. Sheppard had known her almost from her cradle time; he saw her faults as the others probably did not; he had often winced under her occasional touches of sarcasm; he knew very well that she had always done injustice to him, but he knew how sterling, how sweet, how true was the woman's heart that was within her breast; he had seen her tried in all manner of ways, and he had seen that trial always only brought out the simple nobility of her nature; he was as certain as he was of life that if once he could induce her to marry him she would never have any other thought than how to make him happy. In his love there was undoubtedly that calculating spirit which belonged to all his nature. He sometimes admitted this to himself in a manner; for he occasionally said to himself, "No one else would lose so much in losing her as I should, for no one else knows so well what she is worth."

The debate did not last a very long time. It was over in rather a sudden way, Mr. Sheppard thought. As far as he could understand, some one on behalf of the Government was put up to say that Mr. Heron had done quite the right thing in all he did, and that his only mistake was in supposing that there was the faintest idea of disapproving of any part of his administration. Then Mr. Money got up, and in a few short and very telling sentences seemed to say that if the Government had felt approval they had a very odd way of showing it, and that he thought the honourable member for Keeton had much better press his motion for inquiry. Then other Opposition members said something to the same effect; and one or two grave and independent members on the Ministerial side said something of the same kind; and then at last a very leading member of the Government got up, and made the most emphatic assurances of respect and regard for all Mr. Heron had done, and declared that the Government were quite prepared to accept a simple resolution expressing the approval of the House of the manner in which the St. Xavier's Settlements had been administered. There was no possibility of fighting any further. Heron had won a complete victory, and the whole affair was over. Before Mr. Sheppard had time to rise from his seat the House of Commons was occupied with something else, and its benches were nearly empty.

He hurried into the lobby, and had a chance of saying a word or two of congratulation to Mr. Heron. Then he saw Mr. Money come out, and he pushed his way up to him and held him fast.

"Is this true, Mr. Money, this strange news that I hear? Is it true that you are going to leave old England?"

"Quite true, Mr. Sheppard; at least, that I am going to leave old England for a time. I dare say she can muddle on somehow without me."

"And you are going soon?"

"As soon as I can get away. I came down here to-night for the last time to give a vote for Heron's motion, if a vote were needed, which you see it was not. You heard the debate? Didn't they get shabbily out of it?"

Mr. Sheppard was not thinking much of the debate.

"I suppose you take some of your family with you to Russia Mr. Money?"

"Some, yes; but not all."

"Oh, no! I know," Mr. Sheppard said, with the air of one who understands everything. "I was going to ask whether Miss Grey is going with you?"

"Miss Grey? No; why should she go?"

"Well, I didn't know; she and your ladies appear to be such friends, and she is so much alone that I thought perhaps——"

"Miss Grey would be only too welcome," Money said gravely, "if she cared to exile herself, Mr. Sheppard; but I don't think it at all likely that she will leave London."

"Then she will be quite alone?"

Mr. Money looked Sheppard fixedly in the face with a curious expression, in which there was a dash of pity.

"Well, I don't know, Sheppard, I'm sure. Perhaps she will not be so much alone after all. Good-night; if we should not see you again, why then good-bye and good luck."

He wrung Sheppard's hand with a grasp of unusual warmth and friendship. There was something in the pressure as of one who sympathises or commiserates. It was perhaps because he was going away, Mr. Sheppard thought; and he felt touched by the kindness even while he was glad that the Moneys were going away, and that Victor Heron was to be married, and doubtless to go away too; for then Minola would be left to him without a friend to come between the two; and in the end she must marry him.

Mr. Sheppard left the House of Commons and walked to the West Centre, and took up his stand for a while under Minola's windows, thinking of how much alone she soon must be, and having very little idea of how utterly alone she actually was then. If Minola could have looked out of her window and seen him; if she could have known of all his faithful watching; if she could have realised the fact that now in her utter loneliness, when all others seemed to have gone from her, he still remained and was only longing to make himself endurable to her, would she have thought of making to him the offer she had so nearly made to Blanchet? It would be rash to conjecture. She was very wretched, and life seemed to have no hope any more. The desertion of Mary Blanchet had touched her to the very core. It is hard to say what the presence of any love and devotion, however formal and inartistic, might not have done at such a time. Perhaps had she seen Sheppard in that moment, and had he spoken out, the cross-purposes of the story of all their lives might have been made complete and inextricable.

Meanwhile Victor Heron had got rid of most of his congratulating friends, and stood alone for a moment in a corner of the thinning lobby. He had won a success, complete and beyond his hopes; it had been a success for his cause, and with that, too, a success for himself. Although Mr. Sheppard had not thought very highly of his style of eloquence, it had taken the House of Commons completely. He could not possibly doubt the reality of the success he had made. Member after member came up to grasp his hand and congratulate him, in that spirit of fellowship which is so remarkable in the House of Commons. Men who were entirely opposed to him in political views—men who had never spoken to him before—men who would have voted against him if the Government had opposed his motion and it had gone to a division, now rushed up to offer him the most sincere congratulations on the success of the speech he had made. Victor was very emotional as we know, and there were moments when he could not reply to these kindly words, and when strange lights seemed to twinkle before his eyes, and he only saw as through a mist. He was proud; he was humbled. In the pride and in the humility, however, there was a dull pain always at his heart. He kept thinking of her who had urged him on again and again to perseverance in his course; who had faith in him when no one else had; who stimulated him to new exertion when no one else saw into his heart and his purpose, and believed in his success. He might have had her to share in the success; her bright eyes might even now be moistening near his own in the joy of this great triumph. In whatever career this might open up to him, he might have had her companionship. She would have helped him to serve his country, and to leave a name which perhaps might be written down with honour in the list of England's servants who had done faithful work. He stood there pulling his moustache and thinking; quite depressed amid all his success, and feeling that, if his cause had had a victory, his life was only a failure.

While he thus stood, some one who had passed into the House of Commons came out into the lobby again; and an arm was put through Heron's, and he heard Mr. Money's voice, and he awoke from his melancholy brooding.

"Will you walk out with me, Heron? There's nothing going on here that you and I are likely to care about. I am going up to

Pall Mall; will you walk with me across the Park? I want to speak to you as soon as possible on a matter of some interest to both of us."

Mr. Money's manner was unusually grave. There was no need for him to tell Victor that he had something serious to say. Victor saw that well enough as he looked in Money's face. Heron felt the blood rush into his own face. He seemed to himself somehow as one to whom an accusation of guilt is suddenly brought home. He did not say a word just then, but allowed Money to lead him away; and they left the lobby together.

As they were passing down Westminster Hall, Money stopped suddenly and turned round:

"I was fond of this old place," he said; "I am sorry to leave it. I had a sort of ambition to get on here once. Odd, is it not, Heron you are just beginning here as I am giving up? I suppose I shall never cross the floor of the House of Commons again. Well, I am sorry; but then there are so many things to be sorry for!"

He said no more, and they walked in silence out of the great Hall and into the streets.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### "HE WRUNG BASSANIO'S HAND, AND SO THEY PARTED."

Mr. Money and Heron crossed the lighted and noisy enclosure in front of Westminster Hall, amid the rattling hansoms, the flashing lamps of carriages, the rushing and shouting of policemen, the cantering up of grooms with horses for the senators who were to ride home, the eager crowd going in, coming out, and hanging round generally, in the hope of seeing anything. They passed out of the enclosure, and across Parliament Square, and so into the road through the Park. A contrast was ready for them there. The place was all silent, dark, and lonely. Over the broad arid spaces that opened out before them, along by the Horse Guards and up to where the column on Waterloo Place could be seen faintly marking the dark grey sky with its darker grey, there were hardly any living figures but their own. Up to this time they had not spoken a word. Then Money began:

"That's turned out all right, Heron? You are satisfied, of course, with the way things went?"

"Oh, yes; everything turned out better even than I expected. I owe you a great deal for your part in it."

"That's nothing. They acted shabbily at first—the Government, I mean; but they always do; and it's all the better for you that they had to give in so completely. Your speech was capital; a complete success; everybody says so. You are all right, whether you choose to stay in Parliament or whether you don't."

"I don't know what I shall do," Victor said despondingly. He was not thinking much now of his parliamentary success, or of his righted grievance. He knew that it was not to talk to him about this that Money had brought him this way, and he waited for what he knew must be coming; reluctant to hear it, longing to have it out and done with. There was a moment's silence; then Money said, "Oh, you have time enough to think about all that!"

This had reference to Victor's last answer. Victor had once more the pain of expecting that the real business was coming and of being deceived. Nothing more was said on that subject; they walked on silent again. Victor was making up his mind to abridge his agony by telling Money that he knew what he had come to speak about, and begging that they might get to it at once; when at last Mr. Money, after a cough or two, and one or two hasty hard puffs at his cigar, began to speak in a voice which made Heron quite certain that the real moment had arrived.

"About this little girl of mine—I am afraid, Heron, we have been getting into rather a false position, and I think we had better get out of it as soon as we can."

"Lucy has been speaking to you?" Heron said, in the tone of one who has no defence to make.

"She has. She spoke out very sensibly, I think; I am glad my little maid has so much sense. She has made up her mind."

"Made up her mind to what?"

"She thinks that you and she would make a great mistake if you were to get married. You have both made a mistake already, and she thinks—and I think, Heron—it would be only making things infinitely worse, and incurable in fact, if you were to carry on the thing any longer."

"Why does Lucy think of this?"

"She says she is convinced that between you and her there is not—well, that there is not that sort of love which would make it safe and happy for you to marry. She thinks that there is some one you would care for more if you had the chance, and who would care more for you—and, in short, she is resolved that you and she are both to be set free."

"Lucy never said a word of this to me—she never complained to me of anything—she never spoke of such a thing. Some one must have been telling her something——"

"I don't know anything about that—she has not told me, and I have asked her no questions. I believe the truth is, Heron, that she fancies Miss Grey and you would be much better suited to each other, and that you made a sort of mistake when you thought of her, and that she is now in the way between you and her friend; and she is resolved not to be so any longer."

"If this is my fault——" Heron began.

"If it is your fault, Heron, it is partly my fault as well, and more mine than yours or hers——"

"Oh! as to her," Heron broke in, "what fault is there in her?—except that she fancied for a moment she could care about such a fellow as I am, wrapped up in my own trumpery affairs and my twopenny grievances. What other fault could there be in her?"

"Well, I know there is some fault in me—and I am the cause of all this, in a manner, at least. I made a dead set at you, Heron; I confess it. I thought you would make a capital husband for my girl; I own that I did my very best to throw you two together. Odd, isn't it, that a man should do such a thing? Her mother was as innocent of the whole affair as the child unborn. I was the matchmaker. The plot was innocent enough, Heron; for I should have done all the same if you had not sixpence in the world, or the chance of getting it; I should have found the sixpences, if Lucy liked you and you her. I liked you, Heron, and that's a fact, and I do still; and I thought you were the sort of man to whom I could trust my daughter's happiness when I left England, as I always knew I must do sooner or later, and went to live in a country which may be at war with this any day, Heaven knows when or wherefore. *I* have grievances enough against the governments and the systems of this country, but I am Englishman enough to wish that my girls should both be married to genuine, loyal lovers of the old country. Well, I am disappointed; but I see that I have myself to blame. I'll take Lucy to Russia with me; she will not stay here, she says, although she might stay with her sister, if she would."

Victor Heron groaned.

"I wish Lucy and you had never seen me," he said. "You have been the kindest friends to me that man could have—and this is how I make you amends!"

"Well," said Money, "in helping you on, of course I was playing a game of my own part of the time, for I thought I was pushing along a husband for my daughter. I don't blame you, Heron, one bit; it would be out of the nature of things that a boy and girl should not fancy they were in love with one another who were thrown together, as I took care that Lucy and you should be. But, mind, I meant you to love each other really; it was no part of my plan to marry my Lucelet to any man who was not deep and downright in love with her, and she with him. I never calculated on the possibility of both of you making a mistake."

"Then Lucy finds that *she* has made a mistake?" Heron asked, a strange light of hope burning up within him. If he could but think that Lucy wished of her own accord to be free of him, he felt that he could be happy once more.

"Yes," said Money gravely, "my daughter now thinks, Heron, that she has made a mistake. She does not think she is as much in love with you as she ought to be if you were to be married and to be happy; and I fancy she is a good deal relieved to know or to think that you are not in love with her. It will be a case of quits and good friends, I hope, Heron."

Victor was silent and thoughtful for a moment. He was stricken with amazement. It was, indeed, the profoundest relief to find that he was positively thrown over by Lucy. But who could have believed in such a sudden change? All that the worst cynics had ever said of woman could not equal this. There was something shocking in the thought that he might have been married to a girl so light of purpose. He could hardly believe it. Certainly, if anyone but Lucy's father had said it, he would have denied it angrily. Is it possible, he thought, that women generally can be like this?

"She has changed her mind very soon," Victor said; and there was a bitterness in his tone which he could not repress.

"Why she?" Money asked coldly. "Is she the only one? *You* made a mistake, Heron; so did she, it seems."

"Well, I am glad to know that Lucy will not suffer much by this; I am glad there is to be no breaking of hearts."

"On either side; yes, so am I. In truth, Heron, I don't mind admitting to you that I fear my little girl is not a very constant little person, and that she does not always know her own mind. Odd, too; for her mother was and is the most steadfast and devoted of women. But there's a great deal of stuff talked about the influence and example of parents and so forth. No, I don't think Lucelet is a girl who always knows her own mind."

"I should not have thought she was like that," Victor said.

"No; you would rather, I suppose, that she cried her eyes out when she found that you were not exactly as fond of her as she thought you ought to be? That's the way of us men, Heron, I suppose. But I don't mind saying that I am a little surprised, too; and I don't know that I am quite pleased. I am not sure that I wouldn't rather see my girl suffer a little of the heart-ache than have so little heart to suffer in. I shouldn't have thought it of her. But I remember now that she used to be half in love with that Blanchet creature at one time. Well, she isn't like her mother in that way; all the happier, perhaps, for her in the end."

They walked on for a while in silence. Each had enough of his own thoughts to occupy him.

"Oh! one thing I ought to tell you," Money suddenly said, and he touched Victor lightly on the arm. "It may interest you by and by. When I first laid my plans for you, Heron—these plans that have turned out so successful—I had certain ideas of my own. I thought, perhaps, there was some one else who had a better claim on you than Lucelet, and I took some trouble to find out. I had it on the best authority, as the phrase goes, that there was no such person; I would not have moved a step otherwise. If I moved at all, it was because I was assured that the coast was clear."

"I don't think I quite understand——"

"No? I don't think you quite understood yourself at that time. Shall I put it plainer?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, as plainly as words can make it! We have been playing at cross-purposes quite long enough."

"Very well," said Money coolly. "I talked to Miss Grey, and I asked her directly if she knew of anyone who was likely to be nearer to you than Lucelet. I tell you plainly I thought you were much more likely to care for her than for Lucelet, and that she was a girl far better suited to you. She knew perfectly well what I meant; and she answered me."

Even in the darkness of the night Victor knew that the blood was crimsoning his face. He groaned again.

"Yes, she answered me; she told me she knew of no such woman. I believed her then, and I believe her now. I am sure that was what she thought then. It must be owned, Heron, my good fellow, that you don't seem exactly to shine in the art of knowing your own mind. You were very near making a nice muddle of this."

"I have made a nice muddle of everything. I am ashamed to look anyone in the face."

"You will get over that, I dare say. Don't make a muddle again, that's all. You are well out of this, and so are we. I am hardly sorry that Lucelet hasn't her mother's steady true heart, when I think what she might have suffered. Well, that is all about it. We have said all we need to say, I think; for the rest, the more silence the better."

"And I am dismissed?" said Heron, with a melancholy smile.

"You are dismissed. It is my daughter's wish that you and she should see no more of each other, and under the circumstances it is mine. The thing is at an end."

"Will Lucy not even see me?"

"No; she is of opinion that it would be much better she and you should not meet again, and I think so too. She will always think of you with a friendly feeling, and so shall I. Nothing that has happened need make you and me anything but friends, I hope."

By this time they had reached the foot of the flight of steps that leads up to the column on Waterloo Place. They had been walking very slowly. Money came to a stand there as if they were to go no farther together.

"I am so confused by all this," said Heron, "I don't know what to say. I should like to ask Lucy to forgive me; I want to ask you to forgive me. I seem to myself like a criminal, and yet I think you ought to have been all more frank with me; I don't know. I am like one in a dream."

"Better remain in the dream for the present; the rights and wrongs of all this are too puzzling for you or me. All I know is, that the thing is over, and that I am disappointed, and that I feel somehow it serves me right. I bear you no ill-feeling whatever, Heron; I hope you feel the same to me. I liked you; we were good friends. I don't like many men; I am sorry to lose you, and the House of Commons, and my little Lucelet's settlement in life, which I thought was so secure, and I am glad she takes it so easily, and sorry she hasn't feelings a little deeper, perhaps; and altogether I'm somewhat in the condition of the man in the old proverb, who had lost a shilling and found sixpence, and so makes up his mind that things might have been worse."

"I don't see how things could very well have been worse," Heron said despondingly.

"Yes, they would have been a great deal worse if Lucelet and you had found out all this after you were married and not before, and I were away in Russia and couldn't look after my little girl any more. Not that you wouldn't be an excellent husband in any case, Heron, I'm sure, but it would not be the sort of thing we any of us wanted; and it would be too late to set things right then, and it is not now. That's how things might have been worse, Heron."

"There is something in all this I don't understand at all," Heron said vehemently; "I don't mean as regards you, Money, of course; but this sudden change of Lucy's. It isn't like her; I can't make it out——"

"My good fellow, would you have it otherwise? Do you want to persuade Lucelet to change her mind again and to marry you? I tell you openly, that if there were the least chance of her doing so—which there is not—I would not allow her."

"No, I don't mean that; but I am sure she must have been told something about me—this is so unlike her——"

"What does all that matter? The affair is best left as it is. She says she will not marry you; you don't want to marry her; I don't want now that you should marry each other. In Heaven's name what can we all do better than to say no more about it, and shake hands and part? Do you think it is a state of things that is likely to be any the better for asking the why and the wherefore of this and that? I don't. It's all over, Heron, and that's the long and the short of it. I am going to a new country, and a new country is a new career, they say. I dare say you'll hear some day of Lucelet being married to a Russian prince. Anyhow, think of us kindly as we shall of you always, and if you can do anything here and I over there to keep the two countries on terms of friendship, let us do so, in God's name, my boy. I don't want to finish up my career by firing upon the old flag or failing to stand by the new one; and so good-bye."

He held out his hand. Victor took it in silence. Indeed, he would have found it hard to say anything very coherent just then.

"Oh! by the way," Money said, "I was near forgetting. You have a cigar-case about you?"

Victor produced his cigar-case.

"Give it to me," Money said, "and take mine. It will be a friendly exchange, and will remind us of each other if we need any reminding. Here—that's the cigar-case I had when we met and talked together that first night in Paris."

Heron took the case and gave his own, saying, as well as he could, "And this is the one that I had then, too."

"Ah, yes, I was in hopes it would be so. Well, that's all right. You told me then I had better have nothing to do with you—don't you remember?—because you were a man with a grievance."

"I wish to Heaven you had followed my advice."

"No, no, Heron; don't say that. You are not to blame for anything, and we were good friends, and we always shall be I hope, and we have had some pleasant times together, and I hope to hear lots of good news of you in every way. Well, good-bye, and whenever either of us pulls out his cigar-case to have a smoke, he can't help thinking of the night we first talked together in Paris."

"Yes," Heron said, "and of the last night we talked together in London."

Not another word was said. They shook hands again, and went their different ways. Money went up the steps to Waterloo Place, and Heron walked slowly along the dark road by the railings of the Park, hardly knowing indeed whither he was going. If, out of all the sudden confusion, some brighter way was likely to open upon him than that which he had of late been so darkly treading, it is only justice to him to say that he did not then think of that or of anything that directly concerned himself. For the moment he only thought of the voice which had always sounded so friendly in his ears since first he heard it on the balcony of the Paris hotel, which had never told him of anything but friendliness and encouragement, and kindness, and which in all probability he was never to hear again. Had any other thoughts tried to force themselves into his mind, he would have resolutely put them away for that hour. The woman whom he loved would surely have been the last on earth to blame him, could she have known of it, because in that moment he gave up his thoughts to the friend he had lost.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A GENERAL BREAKING-UP.

Was Lucy, then, really that fickle light-o'-love that her father had regretfully reported her to be? The answer is a little complex, as most answers are which seek to explain human character. She certainly was no light-o'-love in the sense of having actually changed in any of her personal devotion to Heron. She loved him very deeply for the present; and her love was as likely to prove an abiding emotion if it had the chances in its favour as any sentiment entertained by a girl whose whole nature was affectionate and tender rather than strong. But she had for some time begun to doubt whether Heron was really devoted to her, and whether, if he were not so, they could be very happy together. She had begun to see that her presence was not necessary to his happiness. Many a time she had noticed that he always put aside his favourite topics when he came to talk to her. She had tried to get up such political subjects as she knew to be interesting to him, but she could not throw her soul into them; and, in spite of all that she could do, she saw that he began to think he was boring her when he talked of such things, and he persisted in turning to something else. There were times, indeed, as we have already said, when Victor, stricken with a kind of remorse because he did not love her more, became suddenly so attentive and so tender that Lucy was very happy. But even then she came by degrees to see that this, too, was only a coming down to her level, not a lover's rapturous delight in the society of her he loved. In truth, she had had the greatest desire of her young life gratified so far, and she found that she was not more happy but less happy than before. She began to look forward to the future with a deepening dread.

All this, however, was only a dim apprehension, such as might well trouble the soul of any girl about to enter into an entirely new way of life, and to give up her happiness into the keeping of one who was, after all, comparatively a stranger. Lucy had been so happy at home, so closely cared for, so tenderly loved by father and mother, that she might well feel a little doubt and sinking of the heart at the prospect of leaving for ever the nest in which she had been so sweetly sheltered. Her home life had almost no duties. She was only asked to be happy, and to love her father, mother, and sister; and she could not help doing all this in any case. It would not, therefore, be possible that she could look out with mere delight to the leaving of such a home. But if things had gone on in the ordinary course, she would, perhaps, have begun to think less and less of the danger of not being loved enough by her future husband; and once they were married, she would probably, after a few months, have ceased to think about the matter at all. For up to this time she had only feared that Victor Heron was not as much in love with her as she knew she was with him. The idea had not arisen in her mind that he might all the time be in love with some one else.

These fears and doubts came by fits and starts. There were bright days when she seemed to wake up in the morning with no fears and doubts at all. Such a day was that on which she expected and received the visit from Minola. The very evening before she had been tormented by serious alarms, and begun to think that she must lay open her doubts to some stronger intelligence than her own, and once for all take counsel. There was only one friend to whom she could trust such a confidence, and on whose heart and judgment she thought she could rely, and that was Minola Grey. She wrote to Minola therefore, begging her to come to Victoria Street and see her. This was the letter of which we have already heard, in which she insisted on seeing "dear darling Nola at once, at once," because of something "most particular" on which she wanted her advice "so much, oh, so much!" Strangely enough, when she had written the letter, and thus as she thought made up her mind to seek a confidante and counsel, her doubts and dreads seemed to disappear at once. On the morning when she expected Minola she rose as happy as a bird. She was entirely her old self; she had no doubts or alarms about anything. She felt as she used to do in the childish days when she thought her papa was the richest, greatest, and most powerful man in all the world, who could give his daughter anything she liked to have if it would be good for her. She was satisfied about Victor, about herself, about everything. She determined that when Nola came she would say nothing about the absurd notions that had been in her head and now were completely out of it, and that she would devise some excuse for having sent for Nola, and they would have a delightful day as of old, and she would talk a great deal to Nola about her coming happiness, and the gifts and graces of Victor; and perhaps she would ask Nola whether it would be well for her, Lucy, to keep trying to get herself up in politics, or whether Victor would not rather be free of her embarrassing attempts to follow him up such steep and toilsome, not to say misty, heights? She was so happy and so full of good-nature that she could not refuse her sister Theresa when the latter asked Lucy to go out with her for a short time.

Perhaps the least important person in this story came to be the one whose chance movement most deeply affected all the other persons in it. If Theresa Money had not asked her sister to go out with her that day, the lives of most of the persons we know in these pages would probably have turned out something quite different. Lucy could not refuse darling Theresa just when they were so soon to separate, in a manner at least, and she went out; and when she came back Minola and Victor Heron were together.

She was so happy and in such high spirits. She loved them both so much. She wondered to see them, as she thought, not friendly enough to each other. She brought them together and made their hands clasp. Then she saw how the colour ran to Minola's face, and how her eyes fell, and how Victor Heron's lips quivered and his hand trembled. She looked from one to the other in surprise, and felt for the moment as if some strong electric influence had flung her forcibly out of a circle in which they two remained. Yet nothing came of it. They parted and went their way, as any mere friends might do. Lucy had not the faintest suspicion of any treachery. She was sure that she knew all that was to be known. She felt sure that if she was right in the terrible conjecture that came into her mind, it was a discovery for them as well as for her. But she could not persuade herself that she had not made a discovery. She was pierced through and through by the conviction that that one moment had made a change in their lives which nothing on earth could repair. She was *distraite*, wild, almost hysterical, during the remainder of Minola's short visit; and Minola had not left her very long when Blanchet came and told the story he had to tell.

She did not doubt the literal truth of the story, but she did not interpret it in Blanchet's way. She was sure it was a chance meeting; but she was sure also that some words must then have passed between Minola and Victor which came of the unhappy contact she had forced upon them. Her truthful, genial soul go at the reality of things at once, and she saw Victor and Minola in the Park forming noble, disinterested plans of self-sacrifice and of utter silence for her sake. Then her mind was made up. She resolved to see her father at once and tell him that she would not marry Victor Heron; but she resolved, too, to take the burden of the change of mind wholly on herself. She would not make her father and mother unhappy by telling of her own unhappiness. If Minola and Victor were fond of each other, as now seemed but too sure, she would not offer to give Heron up in any way which might allow of a futile and barren rivalry in self-sacrifice. She would make it impossible for anyone to interfere with the course she had determined to follow. It was only wonderful to her now how she could have avoided seeing something of this before—how it never occurred to her that Minola would be a so much more suitable wife for Victor than she could ever be. Now it all seemed so obvious and clear. Now she understood the strange habitual chilliness which seemed to envelope, like an atmosphere, herself and Victor. Now she understood why their engagement, which she had so longed for, brought her so little happiness. Now her mind went back to that night when she first took Minola into her confidence, and told her of her love for Heron. She remembered how cold, and strange, and unlike herself Minola seemed then; and how from that very hour Minola had always seemed to avoid the company of Heron, with whom she had always before been so friendly; and how sometimes, as

Lucy had seen with wonder, Minola had almost appeared to dislike him. "When I told her about myself," Lucy now felt certain, "she was already in love with him, and from that time out she only tried to hide it and to keep away from him."

Therefore Lucy made her sacrifice, such as it was. Let us not undervalue it, even though there had been growing up in her mind for some time a conviction that when she and Heron became engaged to each other it was the result of a sudden impulse—of an impulse rather from her than from him, and that it was a mistake. She still loved him, not indeed with the depth and strength of a more vigorous nature, but very much. She would probably have been very happy if married to him. Her resolve was not the freak of fickleness, even if her love had not the depth of passion. For the hour, at least, she did not believe it possible she could ever love another man as she had loved Heron, and she never was more deeply impressed with this belief than in the moment when she made up her mind to say that she loved him no more.

Now the thing was done. Some days had passed over, and Lucy's family were all made aware of the change that had taken place, and of the necessity of turning public attention away from it as much as possible. They were making preparations for Theresa's marriage and for the removal to Russia. Lucy kept up her spirits remarkably well, and saw people as if nothing had happened. She even remained in the room with her mother one afternoon, when Lady Limpenny was announced, although a gentle shudder ran through her when she heard the name of the visitor. "She comes to find out all about everything," Lucy said despairingly, as Lady Limpenny rustled, fluttered, and rattled into the room, bringing with her the idea of what Heine called "a tempest in petticoats."

"My dearest Theresa, now do tell me, what *is* this that all the town is ringing with? I do so want to know, for it is so shocking to hear things said that one does not like to hear, and not to be able to say if they are true or false."

"What are the things, Laura?" Mrs. Money asked, in a voice the soft, deep melancholy of which had received from recent occurrences an additional depth of melancholy.

"Oh, well, everything—all sorts of things—you can't have any idea! Is it true that Mr. Money and you are going away to live in Russia?"

"It is quite true, Laura."

"And to be an enemy of this country, perhaps, when everybody says there is sure to be a war. I declare to you, darling

Theresa, I felt when I heard it as if the end of the world were certainly coming. I do believe it is coming."

"I am sure I wish it would come quickly," Lucy interposed.

"Now, you dear, darling creature, why should you wish that? Of all persons in the world, you to wish that! Do tell me why you wish to have the end of the world come so quickly?"

"Because," Lucy answered coolly, "if the end of the world is to come at all, I should like it to come in my time; I should like to see it, Lady Limpenny."

"Oh, that's it? Oh, yes, yes! But I should be dreadfully afraid; I should not have the courage; you young people have so much courage. I am quite afraid to think of it. But it will come very soon, my dear, very soon; you may depend on that. All the signs are there, I am told. Sir James laughs; he only laughs—think of that! But you are going to live in Russia, all of you, at once?"

"After Theresa is married," Mrs. Money explained. "She, of course, will not go with us."

"Of course not—of course not, dearest Theresa. And this darling girl whom I see before me now—does she go?"

"Yes, Lucy goes with us, of course."

"Indeed!" Lady Limpenny opened her eyes to their uttermost capacity of expansion at this answer, and she prolonged the first syllable of her "indeed" so that it resembled some linked sweetness of music long drawn out. When she had said the word once aloud she appeared to say it over two or three times to herself, for she turned and bowed her head with exactly the same wondering, enquiring expression which she put on when she indulged in her public demonstration of amazement.

"Oh, yes! Lucy goes with us, of course. She intends to pick up a Russian prince."

This little pleasantry Mrs. Money had borrowed from her husband, believing it to be rather a subtle and clever device for throwing enquiring people off the scent.

"Indeed! A Russian prince. How very nice! And to have a great many serfs, I suppose, like the lady in *Les Danischeffs*—only I know our dear young friend would not be quite so cruel; and, besides, I believe there are no serfs now. But now tell me, you dears, how does our distinguished friend in Parliament—Mr. Heron, I mean—how does he like this? Won't he be apt to quarrel with the Russian prince?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Mrs. Money; "why should he?"

"Why should he? Oh, indeed! Well, now, really, you do surprise me. Why should he? Well, I should have thought—

but of course you know best. And so you are all going to leave us, and to go to Russia! And if there should be a war? I thought Mr. Money was too much of a patriot——"

"Mr. Money *is* a patriot," his wife solemnly said; "he is too much of a patriot to be able to see his country degraded by an aristocratic system which is inconsistent either with her national progress or with the progress of humanity. England is not the English Government, Laura Limpenny. The English Government have always systematically denied to Mr. Money an opportunity of making his genius serviceable to his country. His genius has no place in this land under such a system. He leaves England; but he loves the land and the people; it is against the system he protests."

"And you are willing to go, Theresa dearest?" Lady Limpenny asked, feeling herself quite unable to make head against the eloquence and power of this speech.

"I have urged him to go where he will be appreciated, Laura."

"Well, I shall miss you all, I am sure," Lady Limpenny said with a profound sigh; "but these are the ways of life, I suppose. Such changes! Our dear young friend the poet—I never can think of his name—do tell me, Lucy darling, what was the name of that very charming young man that I used to meet here."

"Mr. Blanchet?" Lucy said, not very graciously.

"Mr. Blanchet, of course. They tell me that he has left the country—gone to America, they say. He has gone to the far West; that is in America, is it not?"

"But is this true?" Lucy asked. Her pale face coloured at the mention of the luckless poet's name. It had bitter associations for her.

"It is true, Lucy dear," her mother answered, looking at the girl with kindly, tender eyes; "I had not time to tell you about it," she added significantly, meaning that she had not desired to bring up his name unnecessarily to poor Lucy. "He was anxious to go; he thought he could make a career for himself out there, and he was anxious to get out of this anyhow; and I spoke to your papa, and papa thought he had much better go as soon as possible; and he helped him all he could, with letters of introduction and all that; and he has taken his sister with him, and he is gone, my dear."

The helper of unhappy men did not mention the fact that the assistance she and her husband had given to Blanchet was not by any means confined to mere letters of introduction, although of these too he had goodly store.

Lucy withdrew to the window, and looked listlessly out. The poor poet! Once she admired him greatly; and the memories came back of that pleasant girlish time when he was a hero and a sort of god in her eyes. Lately, when he had acted with such treachery, and brought about such strange confusion, she had found some excuse for him because she fancied that perhaps it was disappointed love for her that had made him try to set her against Heron; and although the result had been so sad for her, yet what woman during all the centuries before and since Lady Anne was born would not look with more lenient eye upon the treacheries that were done for love of her? There was something of added loneliness in the knowledge that he too had passed beyond the horizon of her history.

"We hope he will do well in America," Mrs. Money said, "and perhaps become a great man one day, and come back to Europe and see his friends, who will be proud of his success, I am sure."

Lucy came forward again, and stood as it were in her mother's shadow. Lady Limpenny began again complacently:

"So you see, Lucy, darling, I was not wrong in all my news, and your mother knew this as well as I did. You see everybody *is* going away; and our young friend too with the odd, pretty name, the girl with all the lovely hair, you know—the hair that you tell me is really all her own. What is that pretty girl's odd name? I ought to remember it, I am sure."

Mrs. Money would much rather this pretty girl's name had not been brought up just then. But there was no escaping Lady Limpenny, and she quietly answered:

"You mean Miss Grey, Laura—Minola Grey?"

"Yes, to be sure; how could I forget that sweet, pretty, odd name? Minola Grey, of course. And she too has gone away and never means to come back any more, I am told."

"Minola Grey gone away?" Lucy asked in genuine astonishment. "It can't be, Lady Limpenny; why should she go away, mamma? Do you know anything of this too?"

"No, my dearest," her mother said; "I know nothing at all about it. Are you certain, Laura? I t looks so unlikely, you know, that Minola Grey could go anywhere without letting us know something about it."

"Quite certain, darling Theresa. I have only just been at the young lady's lodgings, and so ridiculous I did seem, you can't think—oh! you really can't!"

Lucy looked as if she found no difficulty in thinking of Lady Limpenny making herself seem ridiculous.

"Because," Lady Limpenny explained, in answer to enquiring looks from Mrs. Money, "the very moment I got to the door I forgot the dear young lady's name. I could not remember it. I could only ask for the young lady. But of course they knew whom I meant, for there was no other young lady living there."

"Well, but about her—about Minola?" Mrs. Money asked with a little impatience.

"About her? Oh! yes, yes, to be sure. Well, my dear, they told me she had left that place and left London; and that they did not expect her back any more; they thought she was going to live abroad somewhere—Italy, I think."

"This is extraordinary," Lucy said. "I can't understand it, mamma; I'll go at once and see if Minola has really gone."

"You'll find it all true, darling," Lady Limpenny affirmed, with a grave shake of the head. At first it did not seem to her a matter of great interest, for she assumed that Miss Grey had simply gone to live on the Continent with the knowledge of her friends. But now that there was evidently some mystery about it, she was disposed to make the utmost possible of the mystery, and to plume herself considerably on having been the first to find out the strange thing's occurrence. The truth was that Lady Limpenny had gone first to see Minola in the hope that, under pretence of paying her a gracious and friendly visit, she could induce Minola to tell her more about the Moneys and their present purposes than they would be likely to tell of themselves. Lady Limpenny was really very fond of the Moneys in her own way; but she could not resist the anxiety to find out, if possible, something more about their affairs than they would wish to have known, especially since these affairs had become just now matter of rather common speculation. In Lady Limpenny's eyes, a friend was Mr. Money; a greater friend was Mrs. Money; but the greatest friend of all was, the truth—about their private affairs.

There was nothing more to be got now, however, about the affairs of the Moneys or of anybody else, and Lucy had announced her intention of going to find out something about Miss Grey. It was in Lady Limpenny's mind to offer her companionship, when a card was brought to Mrs. Money, who handed it to Lucy, saying significantly, "Mr. Sheppard, my dear;" and Lady Limpenny decided at once to remain and see this visitor, about whom she had heard a great deal, and whom, from Mrs. Money's look, she at once assumed to be in some way an object of especial interest at the present moment.

Mr. Sheppard looked remarkably pale and perturbed when he entered the room. He had of late become well known to Mrs. Money, who always regarded him with a peculiar interest since the day, now seeming so long ago, when she heard from Mary Blanchet that he was a lover of Minola Grey. She knew too that her husband lately had leaned to the side of Sheppard as a possible husband for Minola, while she herself had in secret preferred the cause of Herbert Blanchet. She did not doubt that Mr. Sheppard's present visit had something to do with Minola and the strange story Lady Limpenny had been telling.

Mr. Sheppard explained that he had not at first had any intention of intruding on the ladies—no emotion or surprise could make him forego his formalism of manner—but that as he found Mr. Money was not at home, he had taken the liberty of paying them a visit. Both ladies expressed themselves as greatly delighted. Mr. Sheppard did not get much further, however, except into such matters as the weather and the debates in Parliament, and Mrs. Money made no effort to draw him into any closer converse. Lady Limpenny penetrated the meaning of this with that remarkable astuteness on which she prided herself, and which she was convinced could never be deceived. "They won't speak before me," she said in her own mind. "It's something very serious and shocking; Miss Grey has gone off and married some dreadful person; or something has occurred which they don't want me to know. But I'll find it all out."

She had nothing better for it at the moment, however, than to take her leave, which she did with many vows that they must all see a great deal of each other before they left England.

"Lady Limpenny is a very dear old friend of mine, Mr. Sheppard," Mrs. Money explained, "but I did not wish to speak of anything concerning some of our friends in the presence even of her. You have come to tell us something about a very dear friend, Mr. Sheppard, have you not?"

"I have come rather to ask you for some information about a very dear friend," Sheppard said, with white and trembling lips, as he rose from his seat and came near Mrs. Money. "I have come to ask you if you can tell me anything about Miss Grey?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Sheppard, I am sorry to say. I thought you had come to relieve our anxiety. Is this true, this story we have just been hearing—is it true that she has left London?"

Sheppard looked from one woman's face to the other. He was always naturally suspicious, and at first he could not believe it possible that they two were not in some plot against him.

"Don't you really know?" he asked. "Don't either of you ladies really know? Don't you know where she has gone, nor why, nor anything about her? Is it possible she can have gone away from London and you not know?"

"I never heard a word about it until a moment ago," Mrs. Money said. "I am all in amazement, Mr. Sheppard; I really felt sure that you knew, and were coming with some explanation from her, perhaps." Mrs. Money had begun to think that perhaps for some inscrutable reason Minola might have consented to marry Mr. Sheppard, and gone down into the country or to Scotland to do it.

"From her," Sheppard said, with a sickly smile; "oh, no! I shall never be entrusted with a message from her. I only want to know now who is the person likely to be entrusted with such a message. I want you ladies to let me know the worst at once, if you can; it isn't any kindness to keep it from me."

Mrs. Money only repeated her assurances and her wonder. Lucy was standing with her eyes looking on the ground, and a faint colour in her cheeks. She did not know anything indeed, but she suspected that Minola's disappearance could in any case bode little good to the hopes of poor Sheppard. Mrs. Money glanced at her daughter with wondering, pitying eyes.

Sheppard turned to Lucy: "You were her friend, Miss Money—her dearest friend. It is impossible she can have left London for good without your knowing something of why she has done so. She could not be ungrateful; nobody that knew her could believe that of her. She must have told you—and you may tell me something. Don't think me rude or pressing; you can hardly understand my feelings, but still I would ask you to make allowance for them."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Sheppard!" said Lucy gently, her eyes filling with tears, "I can perhaps understand your feelings; or, at least, I can make allowance for them. But I can't tell you why Nola has gone away, if she has gone away. She has not told me anything; only I am sure it was with some good purpose, and because she thought she was doing right—or was in some one's way—oh, indeed, I can't explain, and can hardly guess! But I do sympathise with you, Mr. Sheppard, if you will allow me to speak to you plainly and like a friend—and indeed—indeed, there is no use in your thinking of Nola. Don't be angry, mamma, and think that I am talking as a girl oughtn't to talk; I know what I am saying, and I would spare Mr. Sheppard useless pain if I could. Ah!——"

With a start and this exclamation she turned away, for a servant at that moment brought her a letter, and she saw that it was in the handwriting of Minola Grey. She left the room without saying another word.

"Your daughter knows something which she will not tell," Mr. Sheppard said gloomily.

"No," Mrs. Money answered; "she said she knew nothing; but she guesses something, perhaps, which she does not think it right to tell. It would be of no use asking her any more questions, Mr. Sheppard; and she is a good deal disturbed at present."

"Certainly, certainly," Mr. Sheppard hastened to say; "I am quite aware of that: and I have to apologise again for intruding upon you and her at such a time. I may perhaps be allowed to congratulate her and you on the happy marriage she is about to make with one who is so certain of distinction; and indeed I had some hopes, perhaps, that her own happiness would render her only more ready to sympathise with one to whom the fates have been less kind."

"Allow me to remove a misconception, Mr. Sheppard," Mrs. Money said, turning her deep eyes on him and speaking in tones of double-distilled melancholy. "My daughter is not about to be married; she is going to Russia with us; any reports you may have heard to the contrary are entirely untrue."

"But—I beg your pardon," the aghast Sheppard asked; "is it possible?—is it not true that Miss Money is to be married to Mr. Heron?"

"It is not true, Mr. Sheppard; distinctly not true. Whatever thoughts of that kind may once have existed, exist, I can assure you, no longer. Miss Money is not going to marry anyone—at present, at least; she is going to Russia with her father and me."

"Then I see it all! I need not ask any more explanations, and I have only to beg pardon again for having intruded upon you. I see it all now only too clearly; I see that I have thrown away half my life for nothing, and been made a fool of all the time—and this is the end!"

Mrs. Money looked at him in wonder. He was white with anger and excitement. She did not understand him in the least. She had not yet been told the full reason of the breaking-off of the engagement between Lucy and Heron, and knew no more than that Lucy now thought she did not care about him. Her mind was therefore filled with a certain pity for the discarded lover whom she pictured as suffering greatly in secret, and the meaning of Sheppard's words was lost on her. When with a formal bow he quitted the room, she could only think that his disappointment in love must have somewhat disturbed his brain.

Mr. Sheppard went and walked the Victoria Embankment for hours. He was very angry, bitter, and miserable; and yet he was in his secret heart longing to know the worst. He began to be ashamed of the manner in which his life was wasting away in fruitless pursuit of a girl who he now saw could not be made to care for him. If the worst were over he thought he would begin to shake off some of his passion and be like a man again. The worst in his eyes was what he now felt an almost perfect assurance that he was soon destined to hear—the news that Minola Grey and Victor Heron had been married. Why they should have chosen to do this in secret, and by means of a sort of flight, instead of in the open light of day, Mr. Sheppard could not guess; but he felt sure that that would be, or was already, the end of all that long chapter of his existence. How much of his passion had been pure, unselfish love, and how much the eager desire of a self-conceited and ambitious man to succeed in something he had greatly set his heart upon, Mr. Sheppard did not himself know, and had never asked of his consciousness. There were moments, as we know, but as he did not know, when perhaps if chance had set him on to say the right word, or even to present himself at the right instant, he might have found himself in possession of his dearest hope; and made some one else, and perhaps himself, unhappy for life. But the fates had been in league with himself against him; and he was at last growing weary of the long pursuit in which, like the people in a dream who fain would run but cannot, he found some vague, insuperable obstruction always keeping him back. He was growing ashamed of himself. It was not in his nature voluntarily and manfully to give up so long as there seemed to him the faintest possibility that in any moment of good fortune on his side, or of weakness on Minola's, he might yet be successful. But in that bitter evening of disappointment and rage which followed his visit to Mrs. Money, he did think many a time that it would be a relief to him when the worst was known; that he would become a different man when all this tormenting hope and futile struggle was at an end; and that he might be able to take up his life again and turn it to better purpose. It will be a source of consolation to all tender natures to know, that after all Mr. Sheppard is not likely to die of a broken heart even if he should lose Minola Grey.

Meanwhile Lucy in her room had read the letter from Minola. It was a letter which it had cost much pain to write and surely gave much pain to read. It was full of the proud humiliation of a spirit that not willingly humbles itself, but which, brought face to face with the duty, does it to the full. Only one who like Lucy knew already most of the story it had to tell could well have understood all or half it meant to say. Minola took much for granted; she was speaking only to the heart of her friend. She spoke in the briefest manner possible of her meeting with Heron in the Park, and of what Blanchet had told Lucy and had told her about it. She assumed that Lucy would know there was nothing in that chance meeting of which anyone had to be ashamed—except indeed the unworthy friend who had misconstrued it, and over him, too, Minola passed with the fewest words. What the letter was meant to tell was that Minola had determined to leave England, and not to return for many, many years; making no pretence at concealment of the truth that she did so because of an unhappy, a long-cherished, and a long-hidden love. Long since she would have gone away, Minola said, but that she dreaded to have her secret guessed at, and believed she could otherwise conceal it for ever. So far as the letter told, it was but the unhappy love of the writer for a man she could not marry. No word in it hinted at the possibility of the unhappy love being unhappily too well returned. Minola's only thought still was to keep Lucy and Victor Heron together.

"So now, dear, dear Lucy, good-bye. I shall only be a day or two more at Keeton, and shall merely rush through London on my way outwards, so that I shan't see you any more for the present. But we shall meet again some time, when I have got over all this, and am not ashamed of myself or of you any more; and we shall be friends, as we are. I could say ever so much more, but to what end, dear? I leave you to do with my wretched secret as you please; to hide it or proclaim it just as you like; only I can't claim for this mood of mind even the courage of desperation or the merit of self-inflicted penance, for I know well enough all the time how very safe it is in your dear little kindly hands. Say whatever you think right for me in the way of good-byes and of good wishes to your father, and mother, and sister, and to anyone else you think fit; you could not possibly say anything too strong in the way of affection and gratitude from me to all who are close to you and whom you love.

"Always, dear Lucy, your friend,

"NOLA."

As soon as she could do anything for her tears Lucy sat down and wrote a few lines to Victor Heron, telling him that Nola was at Keeton, and that if he went there at once he might find her before she left England, and bidding him go to her, and wishing her and him all happiness. This letter she gave to a servant, telling him to take a hansom cab and find Mr. Heron wherever he was, and give it to him. Then Lucy quietly came downstairs and sat by her mother's side, and whispered to her:

"Mamma, I am ready to go to Russia now any time. I think we shall be much happier there than here."

The letter found Victor Heron in a sort of despair. He had written to Minola, and got no answer; he had gone to her old place, and found that his letter was still lying there. Nothing was known of Minola, except that she had left London, that she was not expected there any more, and that it was supposed she had gone to live "in France, or Italy, or somewhere;" and that Mary Blanchet had gone with her brother to America.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### "WHERE I DID BEGIN, THERE SHALL I END."

When Minola began to realise the fact that Mary Blanchet had actually left her, and that she was now for the first time alone in very deed, an utter sense of desolation came over her. It showed itself first in the shape of complete inaction. She sat down and moodily thought, and seemed to have nothing else to do. She had never before understood how completely helpless a woman may become, nor how much she is compelled by the necessities of her being, or by the social laws, or by all together, to be a dependent creature. The falling off of Mary Blanchet seemed to be the last blow. She had now not a friend left in London, not a friend indeed in the world, to whom she could turn for guidance or comfort. The mere physical sense of loneliness was something hardly to be borne.

She ought to have found consolation, perhaps sufficient, in the knowledge that she had done no wrong, and that her troubles, such as they were, had not been the result of any fault of hers. But it is to be feared that Minola did not belong to that class of persons whose well-regulated minds can always show them when they have done no wrong, and who can therefore wrap themselves up in their comfortable mantle of self-satisfaction and go to sleep, as Byron did on the deck of the vessel when the storm was raging and he found that he could neither help nor hinder. Minola kept racking her mind to know whether she had not in some way done wrong, and been thus to blame for the troubles that had come on her and on so many of her friends. She felt as if in some way she must have done wrong to Lucy Money. Even when she found herself breaking into tears at the defection of Mary Blanchet, she went on asking herself whether there must not be something strangely defective in her own nature, seeing that she could not keep even poor Mary, for whom she had done so much, still faithful to her.

One thing was clear to her during all her depression; and it was that, as soon as she could rally enough of mental strength to do anything, she must efface herself from the association of the few friends she had known in London. She must absolutely take herself away from those to whom her presence henceforth could only be an embarrassment. All her scheme of lonely and proud independence had been a disastrous failure; and her only business now was to get out of it with the least harm to those she still so much loved. If she were absolutely gone out of sight and reach of Lucy and Heron, all, she thought, might yet come right. The suddenly discovered love of Heron and her, too early seen unknown and known too late, would be but an episode in his life, to be looked back upon hereafter with kindly, unembittered emotion. For herself she should at least have always the sweet memory that she had loved and been loved when she was young.

She prepared, therefore, after one miserable night, for what she called effacing herself. She had determined to go and live in Rome. It became more and more an idea of hers that she would be able to find peace in Rome—that refuge to which so many sick hearts are always turning, they know not why. But in the mean time there must be arrangements made for enabling her project of living at Rome to be conveniently carried out. The best thing, therefore, that she could think of was to go down to Keeton and consult the lawyer in the hands of whose firm the yet unarranged affairs of her father and herself remained. She had a pleasant recollection of a motherly, kindly woman, his wife, who showed a deep interest in her during her last visit to Dukes-Keeton—that visit which was fraught with such momentous consequences. She thought, too, she would be glad to have a look at Keeton for the last time; it should, she felt resolved, be the very last time. Wherever she might go afterwards, whether she remained in Rome or wandered on to some other resting-place, she was determined that she would not return to England. She remembered one or two pleasant girls in the lawyer's house; and she thought that they would help her among them to make her arrangements, and get her some intelligent, well-brought-up Keeton lass, who would like to travel and see the world, and be her maid and companion, and who would have no brother, or sweetheart, or other male attraction of any kind whose memory must be dragged at each remove a lengthening chain. It would not take long to make these arrangements, and then she would efface herself from England for ever.

She would write, of course, to Lucy and to her mother. But not, she thought, until she was fairly out of London, and so far on her way to her project of self-exile. It would be idle to try to ignore what had happened, and to go to see the Moneys and try to make them believe, or to seem as if they believed, that she was leaving England simply because she had taken a whim for travel. All that would be absurd now. For her own sake and the sake of all others concerned she had only to go out of England as soon as possible, and begin for the second time a new life. Her arrangements for leaving town were soon made; and one soft spring evening she found herself straining her eyes from the window of a railway carriage for a last look at the London of her dreams and hopes.

She found in Keeton all the welcome and kindness she had expected. She had no trouble in making her arrangements to go to Rome. She even went and paid a visit of friendly farewell to Mr. Saulsbury, and was civilly received, and tried at first to think the civility was warmth. But it soon grew plain, even to her disturbed powers of observation, that Mr. Saulsbury regarded her resolve to visit Rome as only a preliminary to her passing over altogether to the faith of Rome, and therefore could not bring himself to receive her on any terms of cordiality. He seemed now such an absurd old person to Minola, that she wondered how she could ever have been so foolish as to have any misunderstanding with him, or to complain of anything he said or did.

She left him, never in all probability to see him again. He felt convinced that he had impressed her rather profoundly at this their final interview, and trusted that even in Rome itself some of his severe admonitions might remain in her memory and ring in her ears.

She wrote to Lucy the letter we have already heard of; and then she began to feel as if she had taken leave of all the breathing world, and were about to enter a tomb. If she had ever been of the faith which so alarmed poor Mr. Saulsbury, it is certain that she would have gone to Rome with the resolve to shelter herself within one of its sanctuaries.

A day or two passed away; and she was almost on the eve of her going. She meant to travel so as to reach London at night, and only to drive from one station to another, and cross to the Continent at once. She got out a map of Rome many a time and tried to study it, as once she used to study the map of London, in order that when she arrived there she might not be a stranger. But she could not recall the old spirit; and for fellow-traveller now she had not her friend Mary Blanchet, but a pretty and red-cheeked Keeton girl, who felt no manner of curiosity about Rome or any other place.

One farewell she had to make, which could not be dispensed with. She must see the park and the mausoleum for the last time. She must be alone there. She must sit once more on the steps of that monument, and think of the past days there, and say it a good-bye for ever. She had been very sad there, and the sadness endeared it to her now; she had had sweet dreams and bright hopes there, and the place where they had floated round her was sanctified like the spot where some ones we have loved lie buried.

It was a calm, beautiful evening as she passed through the streets in Keeton and into the park. The business of the town, such as it was, was still going on, and she knew that she was likely to have the trees all to herself for more than an hour to come. She went on to the mausoleum and met no one.

The voices of the woods were sweet, musical, and melancholy in her ears. She allowed the influence of the scene and its memories to sink into her soul. As she sat on the steps of the monument, she seemed to pass through a series of experiences as long drawn out as those of the Persian king in the story, who during his moment's plunge in the water lived whole years of trial, and toil, and love, and loss. It was strange, and sweet, to close her eyes, and in the murmur of the trees to fancy that she heard the laugh of her brother as he and she played together in the old time that now for the moment seemed to-day again. Then there came back to recollection her girlish days; her romantic fancies and hopes; the heroes of her imaginary, harmless loves; the weary home-life when no one within the four walls that were assumed to constitute her home appeared to care for her any more. And then Mary Blanchet, so kind, and quaint, and good! Ah! but if our lonely heroine meant to enjoy the dreamy, half-sensuous delight of her hour among the trees and the associations of her childhood, she ought not to have allowed any memory of Mary Blanchet to steal in among the recollections; for with that name came all the rest: came the names of the friends she had lost; came with such intensity of regret the thought of the one man whom he had so deeply loved, and whom she must never see more. One little moment of acknowledged love, one moment with a bitterness of secrecy and shame mingled in its passionate, fleeting joy—and this was all, and all was over; and she was going away to lead a lonely life of renunciation and repression, and never to know one ray of happy love. It was hard; she was so very young. She covered her face with her hands, and gave way to a passion of tears. But her tears, even in their starting, brought a new and painful memory with them—the memory of the day when she sat on those very steps before, and was resolved to leave Keeton, and go to be independent and happy in London; and when poor Sheppard came up through these very trees and tried to make her love him. Her heart was softened to him now. He and she were in a manner companions in misfortune. She reproached herself now for having been cold, and sarcastic, and bitter to him that day. She wondered how she could have found it in her heart to be so hard and unkind to anyone who loved; and she felt inclined to own that she deserved any fate that might have come on her since she had been so unsympathetic with others. She still kept her head down and her face hidden in her hands, and was ashamed, reluctant to look up and meet the soft, unpitying brightness of the sun. But she suddenly seemed to hear a sound among the trees that made her start, and she raised her face all flushed and tear-stained as it was, and, with her eyes glittering in grief and alarm, looked eagerly to see if anyone was coming, and if she must fly from her refuge. The last day when she sat in tears there, she was disturbed by the coming of poor Sheppard. He at least was not near to trouble her now. Yet her face kept its shamed and startled expression. Her quick ears had surely caught some sound which did not belong to the rustlings and murmurings of the woods, every distinct voice of which she knew and could assign to the oak, or the beech, or the chestnut, or the plane that owned it. She stood up, ready to escape if anyone should be coming. Yes, surely that was the decided, rapid sound of some one approaching through the wood. She stood in startled attitude, ready for flight, looking more handsome even than usual in her embarrassment and alarm. Up through that very path before her came poor Sheppard that day. See, there actually was some one coming—a man; she could see him plainly. He was far enough away yet to allow her to make the most dignified retreat possible before he could reach the steps of the mausoleum. Did she try to escape? No; she stood still; still as a statue, although not indeed so pale—her face crimsoned with wonder, dread, insane hope, all unspeakable emotion. "Am I losing my reason?" she asked. She did not know whether to advance or escape now; and she could not stand any longer, but sat or fell on the steps of the mausoleum, and waited there for what was to happen. For there was no longer any possibility of mistake or doubt; and it was Victor Heron himself who was coming with rapid steps towards her.

He was breathless when he came up to her.

"I knew I should find you here," he said, and he flung himself on the steps of the mausoleum beside her.

"Where is Lucy—has anything happened?" she stammered.

"Many things have happened that concern you and me; I'll tell you all, only I must say this first—I am free to tell you how I love you, and to ask you to forgive me for not saying this long ago, when I ought to have known it; and I have so much to say—and——" and seated beside her he threw his arm round her, and tried to draw her towards him.

"But Lucy, where is Lucy?" Minola asked, still endeavouring to retain her self-command and to withdraw from his clasp.

"It was Lucy who told me you were here, and sent me to you. No, Minola, you shall not get away from me now; no more cross-purposes! I have come for you. You do love me? You will not send me away? No; I'll never leave you again."

"I was going away," said Minola, trembling, and still bewildered, and hardly knowing what she and he were saying. "I was going away to Rome for ever, to avoid you all, and leave you and Lucy to be happy and free;" and the tears came into her eyes again, and she could not say any more.

"Oh, you shan't go to Rome, or anywhere, unless I go with you!" he said; "but I have so much to tell you. Can you listen now, and understand, do you think?"

"Oh, yes, I can; I am not so absurd!" she answered; feeling, nevertheless, very absurd—if it is absurd to be greatly agitated under the influence of a sudden hope that even yet seems a bewildering impossibility.

Then he began to explain in very rapid and incoherent manner, and with his natural vivacity and impetuosity intensified a hundred-fold by the emotions of the moment. Much of what he said only she could well have followed or even guessed at; some of it she allowed to pass by without quite understanding it. The burden of it all was clear, however: Lucy had found out that she did not really love him, and the breaking off of the engagement had come from her and her father. Heron was absolutely free.

They talked together for a long time. It was strange; he did not, after the few hurried utterances of the first breathless moment, say one word about their becoming man and wife. That was understood and settled somehow without any further speech. Only when he had done his explanation, and made repeated protestations of his sorrow for his own blindness and stupidity, and had declared half-a-dozen times over that she was the most generous creature living to forgive him and endure him, he at last drew her to him and kissed her—and their compact was made.

There were many little intervals of silence. Now that the first rush of surprise and emotion was over, the lovers were rather shy of each other in their new relations.

"I am distressed about Lucy in all this," Minola said. "I wish she could be happy as well as I."

Then she became thoughtful, and glanced inquiringly into Heron's face. She wondered if he had any glimpse of the suspicion that was strong in her mind, and that filled her eyes with new tears, and made her think of Lucy as a heroine of romance and a benefactress. No, he had clearly no such thought.

"Dear, sweet, brave little Lucy!" broke from Minola's lips.

"Yes, yes," Victor said, looking up with sparkling eyes, "wasn't it spirited and sensible of her? She found that she really could not care about me, and she had the courage and truthfulness to say so. Why, another girl would have been afraid of being thought fickle, and would just have let the thing go on and made us both unhappy for life."

Minola remained silent for a moment. Some day, she thought, she would speak with him of all that again, but not now.

"I have to go back to town to-night," he said. "I shall leave Keeton at seven, and be in the House in time for the division."

"I think," she said hesitatingly, "I should like to go to Rome still; I should like to be away from London and from all the people we know for a little."

Heron thought for a moment.

"It would be better, perhaps," he said decisively. "I shall be free in a few days, and I will go to you there. Besides, how glorious to be married in Rome!"

She did not speak. Her heart and eyes were too full. After a moment she rose.

"We must go," she said.

They both looked around them at the scene, the trees, the paths, the mausoleum, in silence. Victor, however, gave his looks after a moment to her upturned beautiful face.

"You are happy, dearest?" he asked, not doubtingly, but for reassurance of the happiness he felt.

"Oh, yes, only too happy! I cannot realise it—yet."

"And you don't dislike men any more?"

"No," she answered with a brightening face; and added, "Nor women either," for she was still thinking of Lucy.

"No more Miss Misanthrope?" he said, and he drew her towards him again.

"No more," she replied, with a blush and a smile; and, hardly knowing what she did, she kissed him.

Then he gently drew her arm within his, and, as the evening was beginning to fall, they went out of the park together.

---

*Spottiswoode & Co., Printers, New-street Square, London.*

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

H&SS
A
3399

UTL AT DOWNSVIEW
D RANGE BAY SHLF POS ITEM C
39 09 09 04 15 017 0